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To: The Chair and Members of the Children's
Scrutiny Committee

County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
Devon
EX2 4QD

Date: 29 May 2023

Contact: Charlie Fisher

Email: charlie.fisher@devon.gov.uk

CHILDREN'S SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 6th June, 2023

A meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Committee is to be held on the above date at 10.30 am at Committee Suite, County Hall, Exeter to consider the following matters.

Donna Manson
Chief Executive

A G E N D A

PART I - OPEN COMMITTEE

1 Apologies

2 Minutes

Minutes of the meeting held on 14 March 2023 (previously circulated).

3 Items Requiring Urgent Attention

Items which in the opinion of the Chair should be considered at the meeting as matters of urgency.

4 Public Participation

Members of the public may make representations/presentations on any substantive matter listed in the published agenda for this meeting, as set out hereunder, relating to a specific matter or an examination of services or facilities provided or to be provided.

MATTERS FOR CONSIDERATION OR REVIEW

5 Scrutiny Committee Work Programme

In accordance with previous practice, Scrutiny Committees are requested to review the list of forthcoming business and determine which items are to be included in the [Work Programme](#).

The Committee may also wish to review the content of the [Cabinet Forward Plan](#) and the Children's Services [Risk Register](#) to see if there are any specific items therein it might wish to explore further.

6 Election of Commissioning Liaison Member

In line with the recommendations of the '[Scrutiny in a Commissioning Council](#)' [Task Group Report](#), the Committee is requested to select a Commissioning Liaison Member, whose role will be to work closely with the relevant Cabinet Members and Chief Officers/Heads of Service, developing a fuller understanding of commissioning processes, and provide a link between Cabinet and Scrutiny on commissioning and commissioned services.

7 SEND Improvement Plan - Progress on Task Group Recommendations (Pages 1 - 8)

Report of the Interim Deputy and SEND Strategic Director, attached.

8 Ofsted Monitoring Visit Letter (Pages 9 - 12)

Ofsted letter dated 23 May 2023, attached.

9 Children's Services Improvement Plan (Pages 13 - 50)

Improvement Plan, attached.

10 Sufficiency Initiatives for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People (Pages 51 - 56)

Report of the Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing, attached.

MATTERS FOR INFORMATION

11 Children's Standing Overview Group (Pages 57 - 62)

Report of the Children's Standing Overview Group dated 18 April 2023, attached.

12 Information Previously Circulated

Below is a list of information previously circulated for Members, since the last meeting, relating to topical developments which have been or are currently being considered by this Scrutiny Committee.

- List of Children's Centres in Devon (9th March)
- Written responses - Breakdown of children and young people in Employment, Education and Training (13th March)
- Written Response - Geographic spread of Devon's Care Leavers (13th March)
- Written Response - Breakdown of Care Leavers aged 17-18 and Care Leavers in Unsuitable Accommodation (13th March)
- Written Response - Breakdown of Assessment Timeliness (13th March)
- Improvement Partnership Board Update (27th March)
- Written Response - Thresholds for EHC Needs Assessments and EHC Plans (29th March)
- Devon Family Hubs Development (20th April)
- Devon Educational Psychology Service: Pressures, actions and priorities (11th May)
- Committee Risk Register (16th May)

[Briefing notes](#)

PART II - ITEMS WHICH MAY BE TAKEN IN THE ABSENCE OF THE PUBLIC AND PRESS

Nil

Members are reminded that Part II Reports contain exempt information and should therefore be treated accordingly. They should not be disclosed or passed on to any other person(s). They need to be disposed of carefully and should be returned to the Democratic Services Officer at the conclusion of the meeting for disposal.

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Declarations of Interest for Members of the Council

It is to be noted that Members of the Council must declare any interest they may have in any item to be considered at this meeting, prior to any discussion taking place on that item.

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Induction Loop available



Report to Children's Scrutiny Committee: SEND Task Group Recommendations: Linked to the SEND Improvement Plan

Jackie Ross

Interim Deputy and SEND Strategic Director

May 2023

The workforce that has the capacity to meet demand:

- **Staff caseloads to be reduced to the average of our demographic neighbours, and no more than 200 per officer.**
 - We currently have 8,412 learners with Education, Health, and Care plans (EHCPs)
 - Based on being fully staffed (43 FTEs) the above is split into 2 teams for Assessment (FA - 14 FTEs) and 4 teams for Annual Review (AR - 29 FTEs)
 - The Assessment team currently holds a caseload of 68 each – national average is 50-60
 - The AR teams currently hold a caseload of 300 each – national average is 200
 - We currently get approx. 200 requests for assessment each month so the number of EHCPs are growing and will continue to do so for the nearby future.

EHC Needs Assessment – DfE Table

Table 1a: EHC assessment case status at end of Calendar month (DfE Table) - 2023

2023	Jan 2023	Feb 2023	Mar 2023	Apr 2023	May 2023
Number of 20 weeks assessments completed	58	62	95	109	66
Number of 20 weeks assessments completed on time	10	7	15	11	2
% Of 20-week assessments completed on time	17%	11%	16%	10%	-
% Of 20-week assessments completed on time cumulative	17%	14%	15%	13%	-
Number of 20-week assessments overdue 30 Weeks	304	393	369	324	-
Number of 20-week assessments overdue 52 Weeks	4	25	32	17	-

Benchmark Data

% 20 week assessments completed on time (2021)

National Average – **59.9%**

Statistical Neighbours – **63.1%**

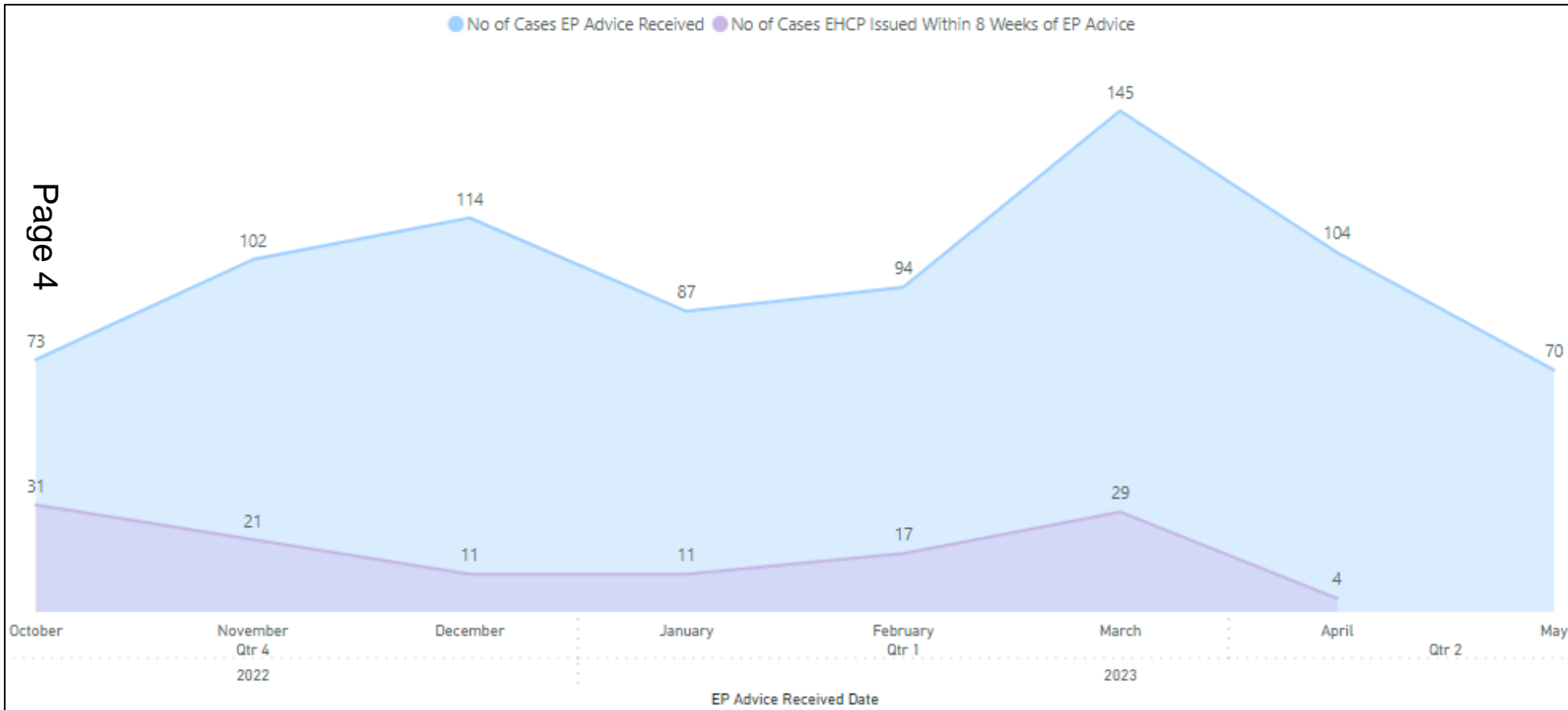
Devon County Council – **38.8%**

Current Devon County Council – **13.0%**

*Source SEN2 – 2021 Data

EHCNA – Advice Timeliness

Table 3: EHCPs completed within 8 weeks after EP advice received.



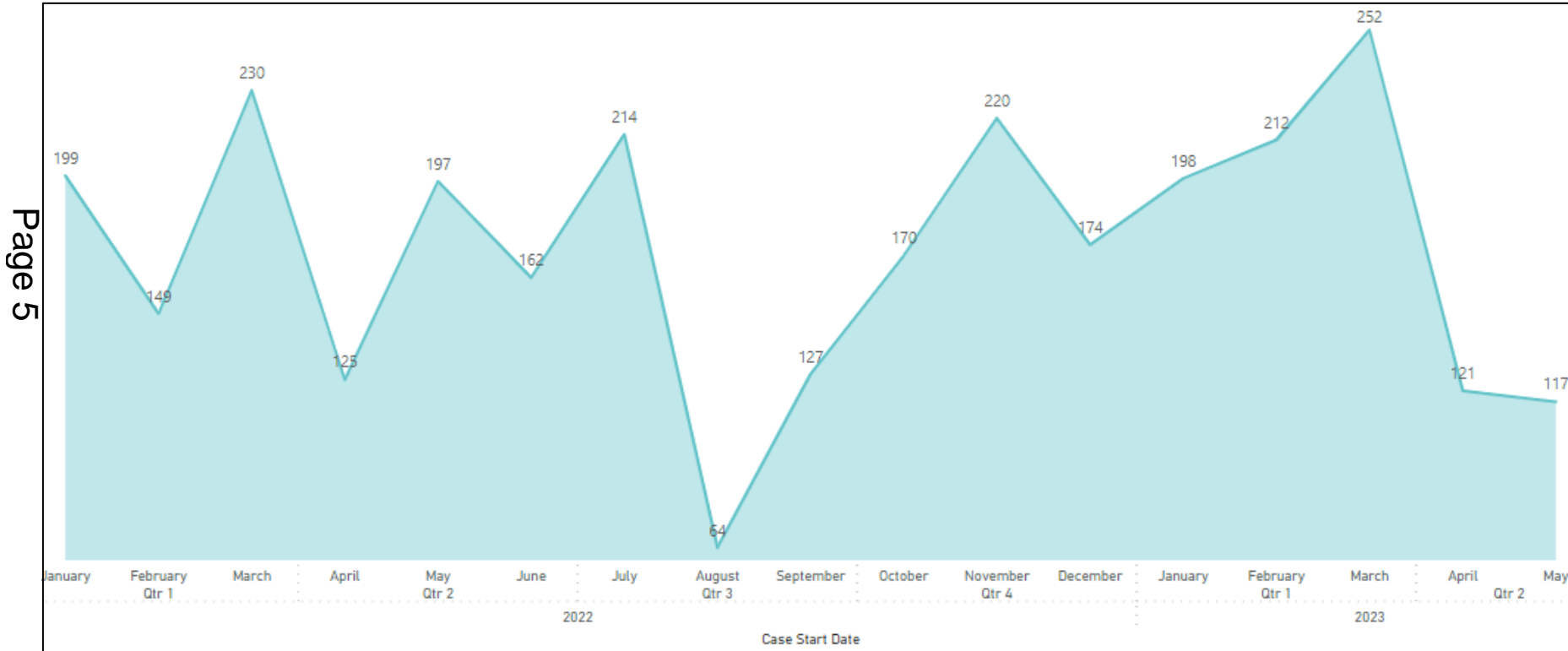
The higher line shows EPS advices supplied to Devon County Council.

The lower line shows the number of cases completed by the SEN team within 8 weeks of EPS advice being received.

*Please note April and May EHCPs issued will increase as 8 weeks has not expired from receipt of EPS advice

EHCNA – Advice Timeliness

Table 4a. New EHC Needs Assessment Requests by Month



Benchmark Data

EHC Needs Assessments Requests Received as % of 0-24 Population

National Average – **0.56%**

Statistical Neighbours – **0.58%**

Devon County Council – **0.83%**

Projected DCC 2023 – **0.91%**

*Source SEN2 – 2021 Data

Using the workforce in the right way

- **The 0-25 team should be able to do the jobs they should be able to do.**
 - Training is being rolled out across the team: IPSEA basic training. Browne Jacobsen on tribunals.
 - Deputy Director on the EHC Plan-a streamlined template going back to basics of the Children and Families Act and the SEND Code of Practice.
 - Subject specific training is ongoing regarding EHC Plans and annual reviews.
 - HR is working with team leads to establish a more holistic programme.
 - There will be training for the team on co-production.

Develop a workforce plan to establish a skilled, sustainable, supported, and sufficient workforce across the Local Area to deliver services to children and young people with SEND.

Upon implementation of the Local Area SEND Improvement Plan as a response to Ofsted, the Council and its partners should produce a system wide Improvement Plan for an outstanding future SEND service.

- The service structure will be reviewed and the direction of travel is to have one team, where assessment and review is business as usual for all caseworkers. It is good practice to align around schools rather than post codes, and also to have a bespoke focus on early years and preparing for adulthood.
- This direction of travel is beyond the SEND improvement plan but would lead to better practice.

- The local offer website and communications are reviewed stakeholder focus group to reflect the needs of parents, carers and professionals.

- There needs to be a new start for the local offer with clear mapping of navigation.

B3	Communicate the current Local Area SEND offer, including Devon’s SEND Local Offer website.	There is clear understanding across the Local Area of the SEND services offer and how they connect by parent carers, young people, and professionals.
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- Ensure that the language and functionality of the hub is reviewed.

- There have been some changes to the hub following meetings with the owners-but the direction of travel needs to be to get back to basics and the team be upskilled in EHC Plans and annual reviews. Work is underway to assess the impact of coming off of the hub.

- Ensure that the new templates and plans are understood across the professionals that use them and that appropriate training is delivered.

- There has been a recent new template which is more compliant and responds to parent concerns that needs are matched more clearly to provision. -Training is being delivered across the Local Area

C3	Set a clear standard across the Local Area on what a good EHC Plan should be.	EHC Plans are of a quality to make a difference to the lives of children and young people.
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A ‘human’ touch in communications

22 May 2023

Julian Wooster
Director of Children's Services (interim)
Devon County Council
County Hall
Topsham Road
Exeter
EX2 4QD

Dear Julian

Monitoring visit to Devon children's services

This letter summarises the findings of the monitoring visit to Devon children's services on 18 and 19 April 2023. This was the fifth monitoring visit since the local authority was judged inadequate in January 2020. His Majesty's Inspectors for this visit were Steve Lowe and Sarah Canto.

Areas covered by the visit

Inspectors reviewed the progress made in the quality and impact of services for children in care, with a particular focus on the following areas of concern identified at the last inspection:

- Permanence planning for children.
- The quality and timeliness of life-story work.
- The assessment of children looked after placed with parents.
- Strategic oversight and grip on areas for improvement and oversight by senior leaders, including case audits and supervision.

This visit was carried out in line with the inspection of local authority children's services (ILACS) framework.

Headline findings

The quality of social work practice across Devon remains inconsistent. Most children in care experience delays in securing permanent homes. This is for a variety of reasons but is mostly due to social workers lacking the confidence, professional curiosity and guidance required to understand children's needs and plan for their futures. Weak management oversight through supervision, insufficient challenge by independent reviewing officers, gaps in recording and poor care planning are often the root cause of these delays. Quality assurance through auditing still lacks

sufficient impact in driving improvements in practice and has required a significant restart.

However, from a low starting point, social workers are increasingly mindful of the importance of helping children to understand their life histories and of securing caring and suitable permanent homes for them as quickly as possible. Although the exception rather than the rule, inspectors found pockets of better practice where this is now being acted on.

The interim but very experienced senior leadership team, supported by a majority of heads of service who are now permanent, has focused on the basic principles of social work since the last monitoring visit. New performance management arrangements, more routine oversight of permanence options and a more open learning culture have resulted in some positive changes and an increased sense of urgency in achieving progress. Although in its infancy, including in terms of its impact, a new quality assurance framework is a positive step. Corporate and political leaders have added weight to the improvement programme financially and by strengthening their own governance arrangements. Crucially, they are engaging partners outside the county council to support the improvement plan, including neighbouring local authorities.

Findings and evaluation of progress

More experienced social workers and those who are permanent are more likely to plan early to achieve adoption for children who could benefit from it, including through fostering to adopt. They demonstrate a clear consideration of cultural matching and an understanding of whether or not it is in children's best interests to remain living with their brothers and sisters. The disabled children's service finds creative solutions to reduce the number of nights children spend away from their families and has a detailed knowledge of the very small number of children who are living in unregistered children's homes.

However, many children are left for longer than necessary without action being taken to achieve their long-term permanence. Agency social work staff continue to make up over 40% of the workforce and in recent months the turnover rate in this cohort has increased significantly. The impact of this lack of consistent relationships for children is particularly apparent when temporary social workers are reliant on other professionals to complete tasks with urgency, for example, when there are delays in the court process or in decisions being made by the Crown Prosecution Service.

Children are mostly visited regularly and at a frequency that meets their needs, more so in the case of those children who keep the same social worker over time. Although not often captured in children's case records or overtly used to inform planning, more frequent visits are helping to support these children to develop and maintain positive relationships with their social workers. Advocates are widely used to amplify children's voices and to offer continuity when social workers change.

Communication techniques used by social workers are generally sensitive to how children choose to engage. Restorative practice coaches are being used intelligently to give an independent insight into how to apply Devon's practice model when working directly with children.

A clear focus on permanence planning since the last monitoring visit has reduced the number of children waiting for a decision about their future by more than half. More active senior manager oversight and regular and more effective use of permanence planning meetings have accelerated these changes. However, this enhanced oversight and decisions about children are not always recorded in children's case files. Contingency plans, to be used if children's situations change, are also not recorded as clearly or as often as they should be. Senior leaders are aware of these shortcomings and have plans to implement a strengthened and more systematic approach in the near future.

Although this is not consistent, some children are helped to understand their life histories and the reasons why they came into care, through skilled direct work by social workers. This is typically supported by longer-term relationships between these children and their workers and by effective use of tools designed to support good communication with children with diverse learning needs.

Children in care who are placed with their parents are living in the right place for them and are almost always supported well by their social workers. For a small number of children who live outside Devon, this support is not as consistent or as strong. However, assessment of these living arrangements and decisions to move children back to their parents in an emergency are not always ratified in writing by senior managers in a timely manner, leaving children in situations where risks are not fully scrutinised.

A small number of children live in unregistered children's homes, usually because of insufficient choice and availability of homes that meet their unique needs. Although this is clearly not suitable for children, these arrangements continue to be overseen by senior managers and team managers who ensure that children receive an increased number of visits and that attempts are made to move children safely into more suitable accommodation. However, the outcome of the weekly review meetings is not always evident on children's records. Apart from those children supported by the disabled children's service, risk assessments, safety plans and notifications to host local authorities are not routinely updated and shared with relevant professionals. This leaves these children more vulnerable than necessary when there are unexpected or unplanned changes in their circumstances, or events such as going missing or placements breaking down.

Although not yet at a level that matches need, there is a steady increase in how consistently and how effectively family members and foster carers are being encouraged to apply for special guardianship orders. In addition to financial assistance, wider advice and support, especially from specialist workers in the

fostering and placement stability teams, supports this transition well. However, this route out of care for children is not routinely sought and a clearly advertised support offer is still in development.

Supervision sessions with social workers are not always used well to support the progress of care plans and can be perfunctory, with records containing more facts than reflection and with limited action plans that often lack specificity.

Following some confusion among social workers about who to go to for decisions and guidance during the ongoing changes in management and leadership, there is a sense of cautious optimism that they are now on a more positive trajectory. Social workers say that communication from the current senior leadership team is much clearer and that they are more visible outside of County Hall, including offering support to those who are working in under-performing teams. Social workers value the support of team managers, who themselves welcome plans to strengthen staffing capacity in the near future.

Quality assurance and performance management structures and systems have been reviewed and are in the early stages of being refreshed and strengthened. New quality performance and review meetings and clearer governance arrangements are showing early signs of promoting both accountability and professional challenge. Audits, however, still lack the impact on practice that is required. This means that they sometimes miss the things that are most important to children, such as the arrangements for spending time with their family and pursuing hobbies and interests.

I am copying this letter to the Department for Education.

Yours sincerely

Steve Lowe
His Majesty's Inspector



Devon Children's Services
Improvement Plan
April 2023 - March 2024

Summary

The Devon Improvement Partnership Board was stood up by the Department for Education in 2020 in response to an Inadequate rating from Ofsted for Children's Social Care Services.

In March 2023 the Board agreed to reset its focus and approach so as to:

- clarify and create shared understanding of the role and purpose of the Board, particularly with new system leaders and Board members
- create the conditions for Board meetings to focus on key outcomes and associated actions
- create partnership priorities, outcomes and actions to become part of the Devon Children's Services Improvement Plan.

The role of the Board is to direct, prioritise, measure and hold accountability for the Improvement Plan and the Devon improvement journey.

As part of this reset, we have created an updated strategic-level Improvement Plan which incorporates:

- actions for the Devon County Council Children's Services which have been developed by the Senior Leadership Team through knowledge, data and understanding; and through the operational work of the Children's Services Heads of Service
- actions for Devon County Council corporate services which are created and governed through a regular strategic Quality Performance and Review Meeting
- actions for the Improvement partners including social care, education, health and police which are developed and governed through the Improvement Partnership Board.

Key outcomes

"I feel safe, supported and loved."

"I only need to tell my story once."

"I want to feel like I belong where I live, and my friends and family can support me."

"I have some control over my life. I understand why decisions are being made and I'm confident that you understand my life."

"My voice - however I am able to communicate - is heard and recorded."

"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way at the right time."

Key priorities

- Develop and improve front door and MASH services.
- Develop and improve Early Help support.
- Ensure a permanent, stable and skilled strategic and tactical leadership for Children's Services.
- Embed consistent understanding and use of Restorative Practice values across all professionals.

Key actions

- Agree a joint vision for childhood in Devon.
- Create a Joint Strategic Needs Assessment.
- Launch an embed a focused and effective auditing approach.
- Develop joint strategies and approaches to support children and young people with complex needs.

Purpose and approach

Our purpose

We care about all children and young people in Devon, they are our future. We are ambitious for our children and young people. In recognising our role as corporate parents, we look at what we and our partners do through the lens of *'Would this be good enough for my child?'*

Our purpose focuses on our relationship with our children and families, and our ambition for every child in Devon to get the right help, at the right time from the right person

Our approach

We aspire to provide consistently Good, or better, services to children and their families, and we recognise that we have considerable work to do to achieve this. This plan explains the strategic action we will take over the next 12 months, and how this will build on the work and learning we have already undertaken. This plan is dynamic and will be updated as we continue to learn and make progress.

We have four priority areas which inform the strategic improvement plan, then feed into and inform our service delivery plans which inform our supervision and appraisal work. This creates a golden thread which connects the strategic and operational actions directly to the impact on children and families. (*Appendix 1*)

Governance and decision making

We have a governance structure which gives clarity on where decisions are made. We will use knowledge, data and understanding effectively to make and record evidence-based decisions. (*Appendix 1*)

Learning

We are working to create a learning organisation where we have safe and supportive conditions for everyone at every level to learn and develop. We will put in place systems and structures which support learning, including our use of data and how we share learning across services and across the organisation.

Principles, Behaviours and Restorative Practice

DCC Core Principles and Behaviours

We want to unlock the potential of individuals, teams and the organisation through embedding core principles and behaviours to increase our effectiveness to do what matters for the people of Devon. They are a fundamental part of our overall approach to becoming an anti-racist learning organisation; committed to continually evolving, learning and transforming so that we can deliver the best possible services for the people of Devon. Our principles and behaviours have been developed by a diverse group of staff from across the council, including our leaders, managers and staff from all service areas.

Restorative Practice

Restorative Devon is a co-ordinated programme of work, funded by Devon County Council, and the DfE to embed restorative values and practice as a whole system approach. In our practice framework we have integrated the core values of restorative practice alongside motivational interviewing as a practical skill for supporting positive changes in family life, blended with concepts from systemic theory that support practitioners in managing risk and uncertainty.

Our practice framework was designed by practitioners to articulate the core values that we believe support good outcomes for children – relational practice, which shows respect to colleagues and families, encourages resilience and responsibility, and is reflective in nature.

Children's Services



Our Core Principles

What we focus on

Our core principles outline what we expect from our organisation and the way we work. They lead to clarity on purpose and direction and help us to create a culture of learning.

Intent

We are committed to being a child-friendly Devon, where all children and young people are safe, healthy, ambitious, and can fulfil their potential

Learning

Create conditions to feel safe to learn by doing, testing and reflecting

Clarity

Seek and create clarity for ourselves and each other

Culture

Developing a restorative culture where practitioners feel safe and supported to co-produce collective outcomes and deliver good practice

Honest and productive conversations

Share what we are thinking and why



Professional skills

Our professional knowledge and skills are the qualifications, experience and expertise we have acquired; they inform our thinking, approach and decisions.

Our Core Behaviours

Who we are

Our core behaviours outline how we should act and behave in our work and in our interactions with others. They are described in terms of expectations and impact.



Generous

Create the conditions to enable learning and promote development and growth



Curious

Learn from people, data, technology and the things around you



Inspiring

Create the conditions for yourself and others to try new things, challenge, ask questions and make good decisions



Committed

Do what you say you are going to do



Authentic

Be real, genuine, sincere, and true to yourself



Respectful

Act with kindness and compassion; appreciate and value differences; learn, collaborate and embrace change

Our Restorative Practices

How we support children and families

The five R's outline how we work together with children and families to achieve positive and lasting change in their lives.



1. Relational

We develop trusted, caring and collaborative relationships.

2. Respect

We respect children and families by being inclusive, participatory and honest

3. Responsibility

We take professional responsibility by being well-informed and risk-aware, while empowering families to have responsibility

4. Resilience

We build resilience by understanding and repairing trauma, while remaining patient and professionally curious to get to the heart of issues that families experience

5. Reflective

We reflect on our relationships and practice making sure we are flexible, responsive and outcomes-focused

Our priority outcome areas

We recognise that there is a lot of work to do to improve across a range of areas. Our priority outcome areas help us to focus on key areas, and to prioritise and align our actions at a strategic and operational level.

Change

Our children, young people and families have their voices heard and their preferences and wishes recorded and met wherever possible. We work with children and families to create their own plans, to improve the way that we deliver services and to achieve the best outcomes for children that we can.

Leadership

We have effective leadership and management creating system-wide high ambitions and expectations for all children and young people. Every manager and leader shares in the responsibility for creating good services for children through effective oversight and strong partnership working, and works to create a culture which values learning from quality assurance and continuous improvement.

Engagement

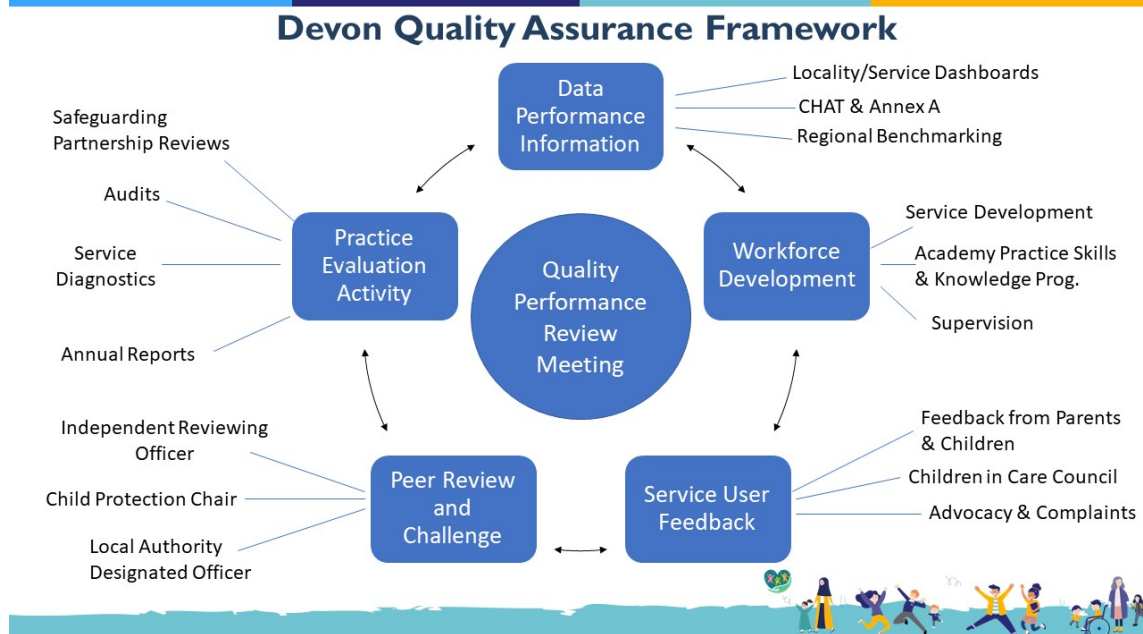
We consistently work restoratively to support families to create sustainable changes that lead to good outcomes for children. We invest in the development of practitioners and managers, so that they are confident and skilled in their ability to work restoratively with families and share a common language and values in a culture which supports relational practice.

Workforce

We have a stable, highly skilled, and permanent workforce which is key to our relational approach to practice. We invest in our workforce to achieve stability and a safe and positive place to work for everyone. We support continuous professional development.

Our Frameworks

Our **Quality Assurance Framework** will provide a clear line of sight to the lived experience of children and the impact of the help that we provide.



The **Learning and Improvement Framework** brings together quality assurance, performance and the voice of children, families, and the workforce into a continuous cycle of improvement. The learning and improvement framework will strengthen the involvement of the workforce in shaping the service, improving practice and outcomes for children.

A quarterly review of the self-assessment will measure the impact of the improvement strategy and review the improvement priorities.

Learning and Improvement Framework



1. Audits

- Monthly Audits
- Thematic Audits
- Dip Sampling.

3. Performance

- KPI high level dashboard
- CLST Dashboard
- Live snapshots and tracking

5. Internal Peer Reviews

- Deep dive into service areas/themes
- Preparation for inspection
- Appreciative enquires
- Rapid Reviews

2. Voice

- Feedback from Children and Families
- Complaints
- Feedback from the workforce and partner agencies

4. Practice Weeks

- Quarterly
- Thematic
- Elected Member, senior leadership and partner involvement

6. Impact and Outcomes

- Quarterly overview report
- Refreshed self assessment/plan
- Communications - 'you said, we did.'

Measures and outcomes

Our measures and targets have been developed by looking at our data and knowledge, our statistical neighbours and the national average for England. They will help us to monitor key elements of our service, and to understand which actions are improving our service and where we need to change our approach. We will use this to report progress through the Improvement Partnership Board, Devon Children and Families Partnership Board and to DCC Children's Services Scrutiny Committee.

These measures form a part of our Quality Assurance Framework (QAF) along with workforce development, service user feedback, peer review and challenge, and practice evaluation. The QAF comes together in reflective, monthly Quality Performance Review Meetings. Monthly thematic audits, dip sampling and practice observations inform the practice evaluation. The audit process will

increasingly seek to involve children, young people and their families in the evaluation of practice and the impact that it has.

Change

Our children, young people and families have their voices heard and their preferences and wishes recorded and met wherever possible.

	Indicator	Baseline April 2023	Where we are now	Target April 2024
Quality Assurance	% of audits rated good or better in:			
	Children in need and Child Protection services	TBD	From May 2023	70%
	Children in care services	TBD	From May 2023	70%
	Care Experienced Young People Services	TBD	From May 2023	70%
	% of audits with feedback from families	TBD	From May 2023	80%

Outcomes

- The views and experience of children, young people and their families are clearly evidenced in our Quality Assurance Framework, giving us greater understanding of how to improve services in a way which really makes a difference for children
- We have clear evidence in our audits that our practice is making a positive impact for vulnerable children.
- We consistently capture feedback in every service which tells us whether children, young people and families are having a better experience with our services. We use this feedback to improve our practice.

Leadership

We have effective leadership and management creating system-wide high ambitions and expectations for all children and young people.

	Indicator	Baseline April 2023	Where we are now	Target April 2024
Quality and Timeliness of Practice	% of referrals which are repeat referrals	19%		19%
	% S47s that progress to ICPC	25%		35%
	% initial assessments with outcome Case to Close	41%		38%
	% of initial assessments completed in 45 days	85%		90%

Child Protection	% ICPCs completed within 15 days of S47	94%		95%
	% of children subject to CPP for 2 years +	2%		2%
	% children starting a CP plan who have been subject to a previous CP plan	28%		25%
Children in Care	% of CIC with an up to date health assessment	90%		95%
	% of CIC with a permanence plan	92%		95%
	% of CIC with an up to date visit	86%		90%
	% children who had three or more placements in the year	14%		10%
	Number of under 16s in unregistered accommodation	5		0
Care Experienced	% Care Leavers in Touch	93%		95%
	% Care Leavers in suitable Accommodation	80%		90%
	% Care Leavers in EET	47%		60%
	% of Pathway plans up to date	83%		90%

Outcomes

- A high number of children are protected from harm because families are offered the right help, the first time they need it, and at the most collaborative level of intervention.
- We have high quality management oversight and reflection which clearly contributes to good outcomes for children.
- Children and young people in our care, or leaving our care, are healthy, feel safe and reach their full potential.
- Staff work in a system designed to minimise bureaucracy, ensuring they are able to spend the majority of their time supporting children and families.
- Staff have access to accurate and timely data which helps to build a learning organisation and focuses on continuous improvement for children.

Engagement

We consistently work restoratively to support families to create sustainable changes that lead to good outcomes for children.

	Indicator	Baseline April 2023	Where are we now	Target April 2024

Number of children/young people supported per 10,000	Referrals to children's social care (per 10,000)	392		450
	Section 47 enquiries (per 10,000)	222		190
	ICPCs (per 10,000)	71		58
	Children who are the subject of a child protection plan at period end (per 10,000)	42		40
	Initial Assessments completed in the period (per 10,000)	391		425
	Children looked after at period end (per 10,000)	58		56
	Rate of children in need at point in time (per 10,000)	281		280
	CiC starts (per 10,000)	33		25
	CiC ends (per 10,000)	16		25

Outcomes

- Our culture is shaped by our core Principles and Behaviours and our Restorative Values; creating an environment where practitioners work with families in a high support and high challenge approach.
- Our children have the right support in the right way at the right time. So that most of our children are safely reunified with their family through skilled intervention and fewer children are subject to Child Protection Plans and are in care.
- We consistently use best practice and evidence-informed models which are aligned with Restorative Practice and support good outcomes for children.

Workforce

We have a stable, highly skilled, and permanent workforce which is key to our relational approach to practice.

	Indicator	Baseline April 2023	Where are we now	Target April 2024
Workforce	% FTE Agency worker rate	42.6		37.5
	Average caseloads	16		16

Outcomes

- Children and families have stable relationships with practitioners who know them well because of a Recruitment and Retention Strategy to improve the stability and well-being of the workforce.
- Practitioners have development opportunities, and are skilled, trusted and empowered to practice in creative ways which in turn supports families to make sustainable changes.
- Devon is a safe and positive place to work for all staff due to a focus on anti-racist practices and behaviours.

1. Children's Services Action Plan

Priority 1

Change

Our children, young people and families have their voices heard and their preferences and wishes recorded and met wherever possible. We work with children and families to create their own plans, to improve the way that we deliver services and to achieve the best outcomes for children that we can.

What needs improvement?

- Good, timely decision-making around permanent and secure arrangements for children coming into care.
- Children living with family members or friends have rigorous and comprehensive assessments and appropriate packages of support.
- No children are living in children’s homes that are not registered with Ofsted.
- Quality assurance through the auditing of social work needs to be clear and of high quality and evidence the child’s lived experience.
- Better involvement of parents in early planning and in the audit process.

0-3 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Strategic ownership and oversight of young people in unsuitable accommodation to ensure young people are housed suitably and can thrive.	1.1 Head of Service for Corporate Parenting will report to DCS children and young people under 25 years who are accommodated in B&B and hotel settings for more than 24 hours. DCS will follow these cases up with district council leads.	In place from April 2023	Director of Children’s Services and Head of Service Corporate Parenting	Reduction in number of young people accommodated in unsuitable accommodation	“I have a safe place to live that is right for me.”
Strategic and council-wide oversight and ownership of support for NEET Care Experienced young people	1.2 Reporting levels of NEET care experienced young people become part of the monthly QPRM process and Scrutiny reporting so that information is understood across Children’s Social Care and used to drive down numbers of NEET young people.	July 2023	Director of Children’s Services	Lower levels of NEET young people	“Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way”
Our Quality Assurance Framework is clear and high-quality, and used effectively and consistently to improve practice for children and families.	1.3 Publish the Quality Assurance Framework and embed it in Children’s Social Care practice through the monthly QPRM sessions.	July 2023	Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing	Quality Assurance Framework is published	“Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way”

3-6 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
We have robust and evidenced-based strategies which incorporate the voice of children and young people to ensure that families get the support they need in social care, accommodation, education and health	1.4 Publish up to date strategies including: Sufficiency Strategy, Commissioning Strategy and Short Breaks Strategy which are focused on purpose, are evidence-based and informed by our understanding of how best to meet children and young people's needs.	September 2023	Heads of Service	Strategies are published	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
We have a system-wide approach to learning and improvement in key areas such as transitions, visits, and engagement with families.	1.5 Embed a monthly audit approach where services complete 10 audits per month which are reviewed at monthly moderation meetings and shared across social care through the QPRM structure.	July 2023	Director of Children's Services	Ten audits are completed and reviewed every month.	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
	1.6 Embed the monthly QPRM approach to drive practice improvement across children's services and build a strong team culture.	July 2023	Director of Children's Services	July review of QPRM shows that the approach adds value and is supporting practice improvement	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
The voice of children and young people is embedded in our approach. Our structure is designed around listening to children and young people and learning from their feedback.	1.7 Feedback from children and young people is included in service feedback for all service areas and shared at QPRM sessions	July 2023	Heads of Service	Every service area has an appropriate process to capture and use feedback from children and young people.	"I know my voice is heard by my worker and by everyone who makes decisions about services for me."
	1.8 MOMO app is being promoted as an effective and responsive way for young people to share their feedback with us.	July 2023	Participation Team Leader	Increased number of users on MOMO app.	

6-12 Months

Outcome (Success Criteria)	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Children supported by us have accurate and high-quality plans which provide them with the right level of support at the right time.	1.9 Focus on practice through practice weeks and coaching supported best practice programme.	March 2024	Heads of Service	Audits show that 60% of children's plans are Good or better.	"I get the right support for my situation."
Services are seamless and appropriate for young people moving into adulthood and planning is clear and timely.	1.10 Establish a structure for strategic co-ordinated commissioning for support for older children and care leavers linked to transition and moving to independence	March 2024	Deputy Director Health and Wellbeing	Plan for co-ordinated commissioning is created.	"I know what my support and my journey looks like from my teens into adulthood."
Our Corporate Parenting approach is focused on purpose and keeps love for our children and young people at the centre of everything we do.	1.11 Publish a Corporate Parenting Strategy reflecting a countywide approach which applies to staff, elected members and partners. Focus on purpose and ensuring that love and care for our children and young people is at the centre of every decision.	October 2023	Head of Service Corporate Parenting	Corporate Parenting Strategy is published	"People who support me make me feel safe and treat me with love and respect"
	1.12 Implement the actions from an independent external review of Corporate Parenting Service	October 2023	Head of Service Corporate Parenting and Participation Team Leader	Survey of children and young people which shows that they report feeling happier and safer.	
Children with disabilities have the support they need to live safely and well at home wherever possible	1.13 Develop a strengthened local offer for children with disabilities and their families which will enable them to remain with their families and/or within their local communities.	October 2023	Head of Service Disabled Children's Service	Increased number of children and young people with disabilities living at home	"I can live the life I want with my family."
Children and families receive high-quality and effective	1.14 Develop an Early Help and effective front door service which can understand and provide	December 2023	Deputy Director of Children's Social Care	Reduced numbers of Children in Need	"I get the right support for my situation."

<p>understanding and support which meets their needs providing them with the right support at the right time.</p>	<p>children and young people with the right support at the right time to meet need early, reducing the number of re-referrals and contributing to reduced numbers of Children in Need.</p>			<p>Reduced numbers of re-referrals</p>	
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Priority 2

Leadership

We have effective leadership and management creating system-wide high ambitions and expectations for all children and young people. Every manager and leader shares in the responsibility for creating good services for children through effective oversight and strong partnership working and works to create a culture which values learning from quality assurance and continuous improvement.

What needs improvement?

- Promoting stability remains primarily reactive and not focused enough on early intervention.
- The skills audit of foster carers needs to be completed.
- Audits and self-assessment show that practice is variable and further work is required to ensure safe placement for children with parents.

- NEET performance remains lower than the national and statistical neighbour comparators.
- Review of the Audit Framework to improve the quality of audits, moderation and engagement of the workforce.
- Review of arrangements for children and young people who are missing from home, care, or full-time school education (including those who are excluded from school) and those at risk of exploitation and trafficking.

0-3 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Whole council approach to, and ownership of, Children's Services improvement	2.1 Establish a Strategic QPRM forum – embedding a strategic level whole council approach to children's services improvement including the Chief Executive and Directors of Finance, Legal and HR.	April 2023	Director of Children's Services	Strategic QPRM action plan is created and owned; and is shared with Improvement Partnership Board and Scrutiny Committee.	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
We have good quality audits which help leaders and staff to learn and improve practice.	2.2 Publish Audit Framework Review	May 2023	Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing	Audit Framework Review is published	"I always get really good support helps me from workers who understand me."

3-6 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
We welcome peer support and challenge which informs our improvement. We are building sustainable partnerships with our peers.	2.3 We will invite peer-led diagnostic visits which bring in external feedback and support to help us learn and make effective sustainable changes • Strategic Corporate	June 2023	Director of Children's Services	We have plans for improvement work co-produced with our peers We have invited peers to come back for review	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"

	<p>Parenting - DfE Leaving Care Services Adviser</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cornwall – Disabled Children’s Service Diagnostic • Leeds – Early Help Services Review • Dorset – LADO review • Wiltshire – Care Experienced Support 			visits to provide ongoing support and challenge	
We work from a solid data foundation to inform and improve practice	<p>2.4 All children’s social care leaders consistently track and share data to the monthly QPRM session on key performance areas and workforce management.</p> <p>Support Heads of Service to build capability around MI data as necessary.</p>	July 2023	Director of Children’s Services	<p>Increased use of social care dashboards.</p> <p>Data shared in every QPRM report.</p>	“The people who make decisions about making services better for me use good data and information.”
We have good quality consistent reporting, so everyone works from a shared understanding.	<p>2.5 Align our measures and reporting processes for QPRM, Scrutiny and self-assessment so that we are reporting effectively and consistently.</p>	June 2023	Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing and Deputy Director for Social Care	<p>More effective reporting for Scrutiny Committee meetings.</p> <p>Positive feedback on our data and Self-Assessment from April Ofsted Monitoring Visit</p>	“The people who make decisions about making services better for me use good data and information.”
We have a clear and effective process for governance and management of policies and improvement which is embedded in our work.	<p>2.6 Create a programme of work to review and improve our governance approach including policy review and panels to embed good practice in our business as usual.</p>	September 2023	Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing and Deputy Director for Social Care	<p>We can see that panels are making good decisions for children.</p> <p>Staff tell us that they know what to do and where to get support.</p>	“The people who make decisions about making services better for me use good data and information.”

Priority 3

Engagement

We consistently work restoratively to support families to create sustainable changes that lead to good outcomes for children. We invest in the development of practitioners and managers, so that they are confident and skilled in their ability to work restoratively with families; and share a common language and values in a culture which supports relational practice.

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
We have a stable senior leadership team which owns and maintains effective improvement.	2.8 Appoint permanent Director of Children's Services	Appointed by May 2023	Chief Executive	Permanent DCS is in post by December 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
We have a stable senior leadership team which owns and maintains effective improvement.	2.9 Appoint permanent children's senior leadership team	Appointed by April 2023	Director of Children's Services and Chief Executive	Permanent Deputy DCS is in post by August 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
				Our policies are up to date and published.	
We have a stable and well-supported leadership team which owns and maintains effective improvement.	2.7 Identify mentors for our Heads of Service to develop a strengthened and sustained high-quality leadership team	July 2023	Director of Children's Services	All Heads of Service have been offered a mentor.	"The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs."

6-12 Months

What needs improvement?

- The Restorative Practice model introduced by senior leaders is not clearly identifiable in the work of most social workers, or of the council as a whole. Consequently, planning and support remain more reactive than focused on long term, sustainable change.

- Supervision records vary – they should be regular and clear with timescales to achieve next steps
- Supervision records should reference audit outcomes and reflect on the process from the child’s point of view.
- Deprivation of Liberty Order applications should be more tailored to individual children. Planning should be more rigorous to ensure that restrictions are only for as long as absolutely necessary.
- Records for Deprivation of Liberty orders should be clear and complete.

0-3 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria)	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Effective strategic partnership working which supports good quality practice.	3.1 Devon Children and Families Partnership creates new Terms of Reference and Structure creating shared clarity around its role and work in improving services for children in Devon going forward.	June 2023	Deputy Director for Social Care	DCFP publishes a new structure and terms of reference.	“Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way”
We are focused on good quality Restorative Practice which is visible in everything we do.	3.2 Design the strategy for the next stage of our Restorative Practice work. Working with Heads of Service to design training and development approaches which create effective and sustainable changes in our practice	June 2023	Restorative Devon Transformation Lead	Publish a sustainable plan for embedding Restorative Practice over the next twelve months.	“People who support me make me feel safe and treat me with love and respect”

3-6 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Effective and consistent supervision practice across Children’s Services which adds value to practitioners and improves support	3.3 Publish a Supervision Policy which gives clarity on high quality and consistent practice. And which meets need, adds value and links supervision to our purpose and uses the supervision principles.	September 2023	Principal Social Worker and Social Work Academy	Supervision Policy is published	“I get good support which helps me from workers who understand me.”

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for children and families. Supervision practice is linked to Service Development Plans and the Improvement Plan to create a golden thread through every level of the service.	3.4 Work with Leeds Council to create a conference programme focused on improvement in supervision.	August 2023	Deputy Director of Health and Wellbeing and Head of Service - Academy, Quality Assurance and Practice	Conference takes place and staff attend	"The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs."
	3.5 Design and roll out best practice toolkit – including existing best practice examples and developing new ones	September 2023	Principal Social Worker and Social Work Academy	Best practice toolkit is published	"I get good support which helps me from workers who understand me."

6-12 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Organisation focused on Purpose Principles, Behaviours and Restorative Practice which has a clear, co-ordinated and pro-active approach to learning and improvement.	3.6 Embed the organisational Principles and Behaviours at every level from strategic through to operational. Using existing structures to embed the change in the work, such as CSLT, Head of Service Meetings and Team Meetings.	March 2024 – ongoing work throughout the year to create sustainable change	Director of Children's Services and Head of Organisational Change	Regular monthly learning activity is an established part of Extended CSLT	"People who support me make me feel safe and treat me with love and respect"
Effective strategic partnership working which supports good quality practice.	3.7 Work with Research in Practice to hold a conference on practice improvement for social care staff.	October 2023	Director of Children's Services	Conference is held and staff attend	"The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs."

Priority 4

Workforce

We have a stable, highly skilled, and permanent workforce which is key to our relational approach to practice. We invest in our workforce to achieve stability and a safe and positive place to work for everyone. We support continuous professional development.

What needs improvement?

- More consistent quality in supervision practice.
- There are recruitment and retention challenges within Children and Families North, Mid and East Devon.
- Changes of social worker are a key challenge in ensuring children and families receive the right help and support.

0-3 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
Clear and stable structure which supports improvement and gives clear lines of responsibility and decision making	<p>4.1 Launch staff consultation for Phase 2 of Children's Services reshape. Get feedback and publish the proposals.</p> <p>Implement the new structure.</p>	<p>June 2023</p> <p>September 2023</p>	Deputy Director for Health and Wellbeing	<p>New proposals are published</p> <p>New structure is in place creating smaller teams and 38 new posts</p>	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
We have a clear and focused approach to improvement which leaders and staff understand and are aligned with.	4.2 Establish and maintain a thematic approach to practice improvement – focusing on key areas to understand what works well and why, highlighting good practice and areas for improvement across Children's Services	July 2023	Director of Children's Services	All QPRM reports demonstrate a thematic focus starting with supervision and then audits.	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"

3-6 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
We use our estate effectively for our workforce and our children and families to access support. Professionals can work together to secure the best outcomes for	4.3 Ensure teams are based in the right physical locations to work more effectively together and with families	June 2023	Director of Children's Services and Corporate Estates Team	Create a medium term plan for location of teams which will inform longer term planning work	"I know where I need to go to meet my worker and I can get there safely"

children and young people					
Our staff communications are clear, consistent and timely. We balance sharing important messages, best practice and positive news with avoiding overload and minimising duplication.	4.4 Create a strategic communication plan for Children’s Services incorporating service newsletters and timescales to ensure consistency and timeliness of messages.	July 2023	Deputy Director of Health and Wellbeing and Deputy Director of Social Care	We have a consistent set of tools including: - Monthly newsletter - Monthly Teams briefing - Principal Social Worker newsletter - Staff survey	“Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way”
All staff feel valued and supported in a workplace which understands and respects them as an individual. Devon is an employer of choice for social care professionals.	4.5 EDI Workforce Group reports regularly to CSLT to raise key issues at a strategic level. There is strategic support for the Social Work Academy EDI action steps with monitoring and support through CSLT and QPRM.	July 2023	Director of Children’s Services	Higher retention of staff Increased number of permanent staff Fewer grievances related to EDI We have less disproportionality in our service delivery	“The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs.” “People who support me make me feel safe and treat me with love and respect”
All staff feel valued and supported in a workplace which understands and respects them as an individual. Devon is an employer of choice for social care professionals.	4.6 Collate data from key journey points – such as exit interviews, appraisals, inductions and complaints – to build understanding of positives and challenges of working for Devon to inform strategic workforce improvement	June 2023	Children’s Workforce Development Lead	Publish Recruitment and Retention Report	“The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs.”

6-12 Months

Outcome - Success Criteria)	Strategic actions	By when	Action lead/s	Measure	Impact for children and young people
All staff feel valued and supported in a workplace which	4.7 All social care staff will complete the	October 2023	Deputy Director for	All staff have completed the training	“The people who work with me are skilled

understands and respects them as an individual. Devon is an employer of choice for social care professionals.	mandatory EDI online training All senior managers will complete the EDI Advanced training		Health and Wellbeing		and love their jobs.” “People who support me make me feel safe and treat me with love and respect” ³¹
We use our estates effectively for our workforce and for children and families to access support. Professionals work together to get shared understanding and secure the best outcomes for children and young people	4.8 Create a strategic plan setting out our ambition for a locality-based service which aligns social care, education, health and police services.	April 2024	Director of Children’s Services and Corporate Estates Team	A locality plan for services is published	“I know where I need to go to meet my worker and I can get there safely” “Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way”
All staff feel valued, supported and respected in a workplace which understands and respects them as an individual. Devon is an employer of choice for social care professionals	4.9 We will develop and publish a clear career plan for all social care staff giving clarity on opportunities for development and progression pathways in Devon.	September 2023	Children’s Workforce Development Lead and Principal Social Worker	Career plan is published Increased number of permanent staff	“The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs.”

2. DCC Corporate Services Action Plan

DRAFT

DCC strategic Themes / Foundations

- People First
- Leadership and Direction
- Governance and Performance

Corporate Plan Priorities

The corporate plan for the year ahead will, subject to approval by the Council, focus on the following priorities.

1. Improving services and outcomes for children and young people.
2. Improving SEND outcomes and finances.

3. Getting the best value from the public money we spend.
4. Sustaining Adults' Services to achieve good outcomes for vulnerable people whilst achieving best value within financial constraints.
5. Implementation of the People First strategy – recruitment, reward, learning, wellbeing, belonging and voice. Working well together as one council.
6. Reviewing the Council's corporate governance arrangements.
7. Making the best use of our buildings and assets.

Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
Produce a Recovery Plan for complaints and Subject Access Requests	Maria Price /Matthew Jones	Agree improvement plan and advise ICO of improvement plan	20 April 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
Early Help offer join up with Youth Commissioning	Vikki Hearn / Simon Kitchen	<p>Review Devon Levels of need document</p> <p>Identify and agree priority cohorts</p> <p>Joint session to develop understanding and plans</p> <p>Map commissioning and wider opportunities</p> <p>Develop recommendations and options for future work</p>	18 May 2023	<p>"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"</p> <p>Shared understanding of the Council's Early Help offer and definition/scope.</p> <p>Co-produced responses to commissioning and community opportunities.</p>
Early Help offer join up with Youth Commissioning	Vikki Hearn / Simon Kitchen	<p>Review Devon Levels of need document</p> <p>Identify and agree priority cohorts</p> <p>Joint session to develop understanding and plans</p>	<p>24 April 2023</p> <p>28 April 2023</p> <p>18 May 2023</p>	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"

Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
		<p>Map commissioning and wider opportunities</p> <p>Develop recommendations and options for future work</p>	<p>18 May 2023</p> <p>18 May 2023</p>	<p>Shared understanding of the Council's Early Help offer and definition/scope.</p> <p>Co-produced responses to commissioning and community opportunities.</p>
<p>Agree immediate finance leads in Children's Services to provide oversight of budgets</p>	<p>Angie Sinclair and Julian Wooster</p>	<p>Establish clear links between Finance officers and Children's Services officers</p> <p>Link to the Governance review</p>	<p>28 April 2023</p>	<p>"I get the right support for my situation."</p> <p>Better knowledge and practice of budgets and financial regulations</p> <p>Children & Families have access to the right support as needs will be properly identified and have appropriate funding sourced</p>
<p>Shared understanding and agreement on engagement and commitment between Children's Services and corporate partners – agree clear contracts of engagement</p>	<p>Senior Leadership Team, Extended Leadership Team, and DTM</p>	<p>Understand the barriers to engaging with training and processes for Children's Services staff; and the benefits for children and staff in accessing and embedding training and financial processes</p> <p>Clarity about non-negotiables and what is mandatory training built on understanding of what will help Children's Services</p>	<p>18 May 2023</p>	<p>"I get the right support for my situation."</p> <p>Better engagement from CS.</p> <p>Children & Families are supported by staff with up-to-date training and</p>

Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
		<p>managers work more effectively - Improving Performance means there is less critical work to do.</p> <p>Create agreement for engagement and support</p>		<p>knowledge to provide the best possible outcomes</p>
<p>Further develop our strategy for reducing agency workers</p>	<p>Maria Chakraborty</p>	<p>Continue to try to convert agency workers onto permanent contracts</p> <p>Respond to ADCS consultation about agency workers</p> <p>Meet with Children's Recruitment and Retention Lead (Harriet Cadman) to understand how strategy can be developed further</p>	<p>31 May 2023</p>	<p>"I always get really good support from workers who understand me."</p> <p>Reduction in number of agency staff replaced with quality permanent staff</p> <p>Children and families form stable and meaningful relationships with skilled permanent staff to provide continuity</p>
<p>Legal and Children's Services managers to process map legal activities</p>	<p>Maria Price /Julian Wooster</p>	<p>Hold a working group session to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • assess legal thresholds and establish shared understanding of working with thresholds effectively to create best outcomes for children • understand work needed on decision-making linked to pre-proceedings activity • identify immediate actions and complete them and create a longer-term plan to address issues. 	<p>Immediate actions completed by 19 June 2023</p> <p>Plan finalised by 19 June 2023</p>	<p>"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"</p> <p>Ensure that thresholds are working to reduce numbers of children coming in to care and ensure better</p>

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Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
		Meeting with Maria Price, Julian Wooster, Jassi Broadmeadow and Heads of Service		outcomes for children.
Understand the opportunity for joint Pathway Planning and commissioning for young people moving from Children's Services to Adult's Services	Tandra Forster / Julian Wooster	Understand and review the Preparing for Adulthood project in light of QPRM actions.	5 May 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way" Test scope is fit for purpose.
Review of comms and engagement to understand best way forward to support Children's Services comms	Tony Parker	Initial meeting between Tony Parker and Julian Wooster	9 May 2023	"The people who make decisions about making services better for me use good data and information."
Enhance the Learning and Development offer	Julian Wooster and Maria Chakraborty	Establish the engagement and the basics before looking at the enhanced offer of L&D. Continue to engage with staff to feed into actions developing the Learning theme of the People Strategy Identify timeline for the roll out of training which will underpin a plan to pilot some of the corporate training identified in the People Strategy in Children's Services – including learning on the job.	18 May 2023 Learning and Development Strategy finalised by 12 June 2023	"The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs." Improved learning and subsequently management performance Children and families supported by skilled professionals who are up to date with training in their field
Agree Business Partner Model with corporate partners to support Children's Services and work effectively across the Council: initially	SLT	Scoping workshop / session across relevant services	31 May 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the

Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
looking at: HR, Comms, Legal, Finance				right help in the right way”
Establish systems alignment between Children’s Services (Eclipse) and Adult’s Services (Carefirst) recording and case management systems - focus on finance and payment functionality, case note recording and risk assessment; and addressing legacy issues.	Angie Sinclair and Matthew Jones, Julian Wooster and Tandra Forster	<p>IASC Procurement for Carefirst replacement – Children’s Services rep to join project group</p> <p>Map capacity of DCC to manage two separate and potentially uncommunicative IT systems – risk of designing in duplication</p> <p>Develop shared view of specifications and requirement for the replacement system (business case developed)</p> <p>Finance system introduction - risk register and mitigations</p>	Development Plan by 19 June 2023	<p>“Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way”</p> <p>Compatible systems across CS/IASC to ensure efficient data sharing and smooth transition for children and families from CS to IASC</p>
Clarify and improve the Social Work Academy offer – children’s social care and adult’s social care	Children’s Services /IASC – Tandra Forster/Julian Wooster/Maria Chakraborty	<p>A lead identified from Finance, Adults, children’s and HR to work on the alignment within the Hub.</p> <p>Initial plan to give clarity on the current offer and map the new offer.</p>	19 June 2023	<p>“The people who work with me are skilled and love their jobs.”</p> <p>Alignment across IACS /CS learning to enable better working together.</p> <p>Children and families will be supported by skilled professionals throughout their lives</p>
Check statutory data information linked to families receiving Subject Access Record	Matthew Jones /Julian Wooster	<p>Additional staff being employed</p> <p>Action plan agreed to be reported to the ICO</p>	19 June 2023	“People who support me make me feel safe and treat

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Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
(SAR) information on time		SLT performance reporting		me with love and respect" Information being received on time.
Check and sort statutory responses linked to legal requirements	Maria Price / Julian Wooster	Annual report to Standards and Scrutiny Committees Monthly SLT Performance reporting commencing May 2023	19 June 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
Analysis of abandoned calls and also call follow through	Matthew Jones	Establish the process for abandoned calls in the CSC and MASH. Analysis of the abandoned calls. Benchmarking.	19 June 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way" Abandoned calls reduced.
Develop EDS /Out of hours service	Tandra Forster / Julian Wooster / Maria Chakraborty	2022 report considered splitting and enhancing the service between IACS/CS. Need to understand the impact of this and the decision that was taken – DAP to action. SLT to review report. What does the offer need to be across Adults and Children's?		"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way"
Continue work on Council Tax discount for care experienced young people /care leavers	Donna Manson /Keri Denton/ Cllr John Hart	Working with South Hams and West Devon Council agree approach; cost, consultation, and communication Gain political agreement across Team Devon to roll out	19 June 2023	"I get the right support for my situation." Council Tax Exemptions for care leavers agreed (part of Corporate Parenting Action Plan).

Actions	Owner	Steps to be taken	Timescale	Outcomes for Children
Produce a plan for Council assets re-purposing for targeted housing opportunities	Keri Denton / Matthew Jones	Work through assets map already developed and identify key properties Develop appraisal and business case for one / several	19 June 2023	"I know what my support and my journey looks like from my teens into adulthood." Assets Strategy and approach developed and contribution to housing position
Establish fit for purpose governance and Terms of Reference Ensure links to DCC responsibilities statute	Donna Manson / Julian Wooster , Simon Kitchen / Maria Price	Initial meeting to understand the current arrangements and what is required going forward Link in with Maria Price and governance review	19 June 2023	"Everyone involved in supporting me works well together so that I get the right help in the right way" Clear understanding of roles and responsibilities and powers, lack of duplication.

3. Partnership Action Plan

DRAFT

Priority areas

The work of the Improvement Partnership Board will focus on multi-agency working to achieve better outcomes for children and families in these key areas:

1. Improving outcomes of pre-birth services and for infants
2. Improving partnership working in compliance with Working Together, focusing on areas of shared responsibility and multi-agency responses to families

3. Improving response to adolescent need through developing multi-agency contextual safeguarding approaches

We will focus on:

- understanding and working on the root causes not the symptoms
- creating shared understanding of the problem we are trying to solve
- using a strengths-based approach which prioritises working with the family rather than focusing on process
- creating shared understanding of our own and each other's roles, responsibilities, priorities, challenges and opportunities
- creating clarity on the role of the Improvement Partnership Board and the role of the Devon Children and Families Partnership Board to avoid duplication
- taking ownership and responsibility, and completing actions quickly and effectively.

Priority Area 1 – Improving outcomes of pre-birth services and for infants

How we work together to provide effective and consistent support through pregnancy and in the first years of child development. How agencies work together to recognise and best support vulnerable parents and children under two in a way which makes sense to those families.

Outcomes

- I can get the help and support I need for physical, emotional and mental health challenges throughout my pregnancy and my child's early years.
- My child is safe, happy and healthy and I can get the help I need to support and maintain this.

Measures

Measure	Baseline at March 2023	Target
% of infants who received a face-to-face New Birth Visits (NBV) within 14 days of birth*	60%	85%
% of babies who received a 1-year developmental health review by 12 months old*	30%	65%
% of children who received a 2 – 2.5 -year developmental health review by age of 2.5 years*	37%	75%
Number of hospital admissions for under twos		
Number of newborn deaths per annum		
Number of newborn serious incidents per annum	3	
Number of repeat removals of children per annum		
Number of Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews (CSPRs) for under twos.		

**Shared measures across SEND Local Area Improvement Plan and Children’s Social Care Improvement Plan*

Actions

Action	Owner
PA1.1 Map the current service landscape for pregnancy and under twos to create a clear shared picture of the services and support available across Devon – midwifery, HV, parent health, children’s centres etc – create visibility of services available and gap analysis	
PA1.2 Create picture of specialist support available for vulnerable parents and children – Social Care Tier 2 support and above – create visibility of services available and gap analysis	

PA1.3 Establish current data picture for measures from March 2023 to understand Devon figures and comparison to statistical neighbours, South West and England – analysis of the data to create shared context and understanding	
PA1.4 Use the data and understanding from previous actions to create a clear pathway of support for pre-birth and under twos which is recognised and owned by partners	

Priority Area 2 – Improving partnership working in compliance with Working Together, focusing on areas of shared responsibility and multi-agency responses to families

How we effectively and consistently understand and respond to need. Including who provides support, where and how. How agencies work together to understand levels of need and provide the most effective response at the right time.

Outcomes

- I get the right support at the right time in the right way.
- Services work effectively together to support me and my family.

Measures

Measure	Baseline as at March 2023	Target
Number of social care contacts which don't become referrals	78% of contacts do not become referrals	
Reduce percentage of failure demand contacts coming in to MASH	Will measure as part of process mapping in May 2023 38% Repeat contacts	
Reduction in re-referral rates	31%	

Actions

Action	Owner
PA2.1 Create a process map for MASH and wider front door to understand what demand is coming in, why, where it goes and the impact this has – collate with review done by DCFP independent scrutineer, previous MASH project and Leeds review to create one picture of demand and work happening which can be shared and owned by partners	
PA2.2 Use this collated learning to work with MASH leadership and partners to design changes which can be tested and measured to show improvement in efficiency and ability to meet purpose for children and young people	
PA2.3 Use publication of updated Working Together in 2023 to clarify shared understanding of thresholds/levels of need and establish shared pathways and approaches	

Priority Area 3 – Improving response to adolescent need through developing multi-agency contextual safeguarding approaches

Creating a culture of love and care for our teenagers. Creating the conditions to work well with teenagers, understanding them, meeting their needs and keeping them safe in a way that makes sense to them.

Outcomes

- I get the right support at the right time in the right way.
- I feel loved and valued.

Measures

Measure	Baseline as at March 2023	Target
Increase in young people who are EET	47%	60%
Increased school attendance	92.4%	
Reduction in S47 enquiries	58 – April 2023	
Reduction in exclusions	134 total in 22/23 and increase in 49 from 21/22. 47 of these are in secondary	
Reduction in referrals categorised as NFA into MASH		

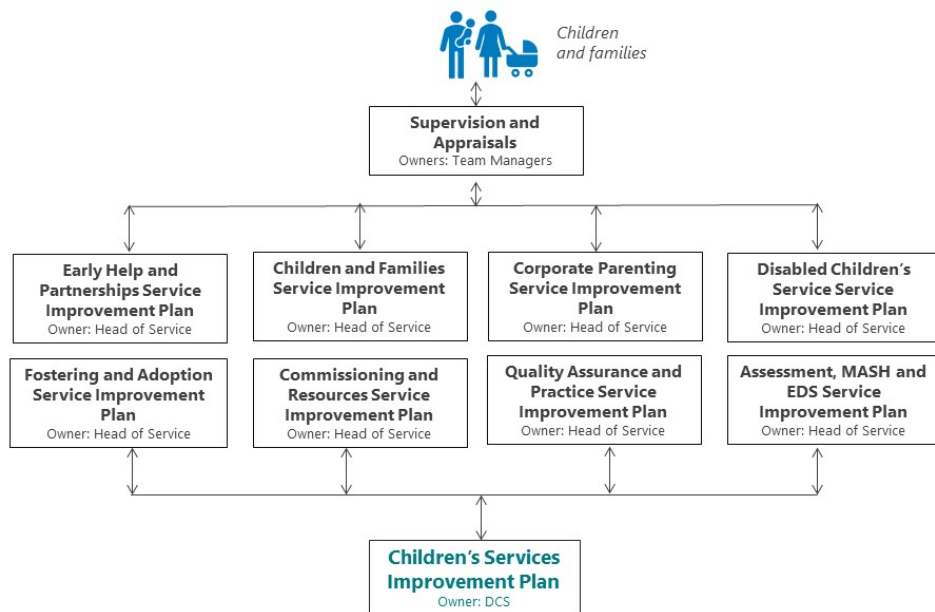
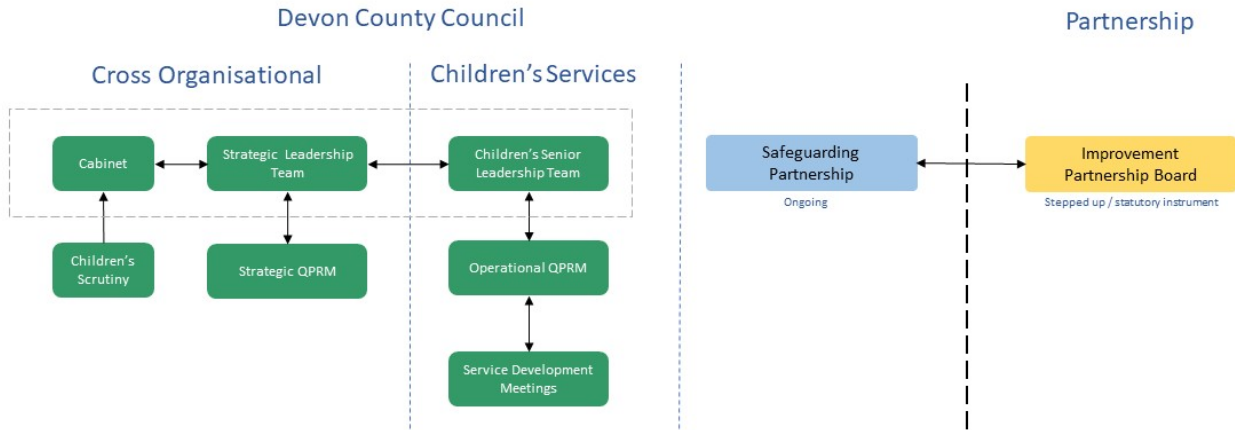
Actions

Action	Owner
PA3.1 Create a shared picture of the current vision and offer for adolescents in Devon. Create a shared picture of the services and pathways for support with demand data inclu for missing/exploitation.	
PA3.2 Using this information create a shared vision for young people in Devon	
PA3.3 Design a clear pathway for support available for young people in Devon with clarity on partner roles and responsibilities – this action links with PA2.2	

Appendix 1

Governance

Children's Social Care Improvement Delivery and Governance Structure



Improvement Partnership Board

The Improvement Partnership Board is chaired by DfE Children's Commissioner Matt Dunkley and meets **monthly**. The Improvement Board drives the strategic implementation of the Partnership Improvement Plan and provides support and challenge to ensure partners are delivering the expected outcomes. The Board includes senior representation from DCC and partners including the Lead Member for Children's Services, senior officers of the council and multi-agency representation.

Strategic Quality Performance and Review Meeting

The Strategic Quality Improvement element of QPRM will provide assurance to the Children's Commissioner that DCC is ensuring that there is sustainable improvement in Children's Social Care. Strategic QPRM will meet every 3/6 months and will be chaired by the Children's Commissioner. Each relevant Corporate Director for ICT, Finance, HR, Business Support (inc. premises) Legal, Governance, Partnerships and Performance will give a presentation on supporting children's social care improvement.

Operational Quality Performance and Review Meeting

The Director for Children and Young Peoples Futures, chairs a **monthly** forum where Heads of Service review data, learning from quality assurance and feedback. This allows progress and patterns to be seen whilst receiving support and challenge from the group about areas of strength and areas for development.

Devon Children and Families Partnership (DCFP)

Progress on the Improvement Plan is also reported to the multi-agency forum of the DCFP executive group, to ensure alignment across the safeguarding partnership.

Children's Scrutiny Committee 6th June 2023

Sufficiency Initiatives for Children in Care and Care Experienced Young People

Report of the Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing (Deputy Chief Officer)

Please note that the following recommendations are subject to consideration and determination by the Cabinet (and confirmation under the provisions of the Council's Constitution) before taking effect.

It is recommended that the Committee:

- a) To consider and comment on the sufficiency initiatives outlined in this report.
- b) To review the next steps for each project.

1. Summary

- 1.1 The council has recently secured funding following the submission of two successful bids to the Department of Education for the following initiatives:

The DFE Children's Home Capital Programme

- 1.2 Tenders to carry out capital works to increase capacity at Welland Children's Home and Barnes Children's Home were published in 2022 in line with the Devon County Council 2022-23 capital programme. Following receipt of tenders in 2022, the capital available was not sufficient to carry out these projects and they were put on hold.
- 1.3 To increase the supply of children's homes accommodation the Department for Education launched the Wave 1 Children's Homes Capital Programme 2021-2023 in July 2021. Devon County Council were unsuccessful in bidding for this round of funding.
- 1.4 A 'Wave 2' round of DFE Children's Home Capital Programme funding was announced in June 2022 with a bid deadline of September 9, 2022.
- 1.5 Following submission of a revised Wave 2 bid, the council was awarded capital funding of £733,354 from the DFE Children's Home Capital Programme to develop Welland Children's Home and a new children's home at The Link Centre to create five new 52-week placements for complex needs children in care.
- 1.6 The DFE funding has enabled the council to use existing and new resources to match fund the capital projects for Welland and The Link Centre. Additional council capital from the Basic Need Grant has also been identified to fund the children's home extension of Barnes Children's Home to create 2-3 additional 52-week placements at that home.

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- 1.7 The tenders for Welland and Barnes have been published for a second time. Subject to Council approval of an updated FIN letter, published on 19th May 2023, these tenders will be awarded soon.
- 1.8 The capital project for the new children's home at The Link Centre in Holsworthy is not ready to go to tender. Further work on tender development and consultation is ongoing before this project is finalised and the capital funding allocation is approved.
- 1.9 The council has also identified £733,354 of Basic Needs Capital Grant funding to provide the required 50% match funding for the DFE grant.
- 1.10 Officers in children's services will continue to consider opportunities for the development of other small children's homes to ensure that, where possible, we are able to provide local homes for Devon children.

The DFE Staying Close Programme

- 1.11 Devon County Council secured a grant of £1,147,106 in May 2023 from the Department for Education following a bid for funding under the Staying Close programme. The revenue funding is to be used over the next 2 years to pilot supported accommodation for care experienced young people.
- 1.12 This is a priority programme for the government to ensure effective transition to independence for care experienced young people aged 18+ in England. The proposed delivery model and objectives of the project and the next steps for delivery are set out below.
- 1.13 The successful bid submitted by DCC sets out how the council proposes to use up to 6 buildings to accommodate a minimum of 24 care experienced young people aged 18+ in high and medium needs provision. The young people will benefit from the support of a personal advisor and key workers for between 12 and 18 months, depending on their needs.
- 1.14 These services will enable the Council to provide semi-independent supported accommodation for care experienced young people who are currently living in high cost supported accommodation for 16-18 year-olds and residential children's homes. The Staying Close offer will provide more tailored support which is better suited to the transition to independent living.

2. Background - DCC Children's Home Capital Programme

- 2.1 The recent Competition and Markets Authority (CMA) Children's Social Care Study found that there is:

'a lack of placements of the right kind, in the right places.'

This is reflected in the acute challenge faced by local authorities when placing young people with complex needs in the South-West of England.

Profile of Children in Residential Care in Devon

- 2.2 The Devon Sufficiency 2022-24 showed that the number of children in care increased significantly in 2020-21. A high proportion of these children have significant learning needs and disabilities, with 39% having an EHCP and a further 24% in receipt of SEN support in school.
- 2.3 At the same time, the number of children looked after placed by the council in children's homes increased from 70 in April 2020 to 102 young people in May 2023. In September 2022, 51 out of 90 children in residential care were placed within Devon. The remaining children and young people were placed outside Devon, often at a very significant distance from home. An out of county placement disrupts links with family and friends, as well as engagement with education and health services.
- 2.4 The council currently provides 4 children's homes, 3 respite and one long term, all of which are for children with a disability. All of these homes are currently rated as 'Good' by OFSTED and they have stable staffing teams delivering for our young people.
- 2.5 The mainstream children's home market in Devon is wholly delivered by private and voluntary sector providers. These providers are often reluctant or unable to accommodate our most complex young people, due to the challenges of meeting their needs and matching with other children and young people. Consequently, options for placing complex needs young people are extremely limited.

Cost of Residential Care in Devon

- 2.6 The average cost of a placement in a private or children's home in England and Wales was £4,153 per week in 2020-21, from figures published by the Personal Social Services Review Unit, which is the latest figure available. The current average cost, in September 2022, for DCC young people in residential care was £5,608 per week. The higher average cost reflects the shortage of supply in the local market and the high needs of some of the looked after children.
- 2.7 In September 2022, the 20 highest cost residential placements of children in care in Devon cost an average of £12,617 per week. These young people are mostly accommodated in registered children's homes, with a small number in unregistered placements. The council is committed to securing high quality registered placements for all young people in care.
- 2.8 The new children's homes will provide a multi-agency therapeutic model of care and education in Devon. This will ensure that young people have a stable and supportive environment in good accommodation. Visits from family, friends, and professionals will be more regular and it will be possible to create a network of support service around the homes.
- 2.9 The homes will have facilities and support services tailored to the high needs of the young people in our care. The aim is to secure positive outcomes that enable the young people to move on to less intensive provision over time as their needs reduce. This will greatly reduce placement moves for this cohort of young people and the number of unregulated placements accessed by the council

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2.10 The attached slide deck provides more detail on the rational and objectives for the three new children's homes which are due to be completed in this financial year.

3. Background - DCC Staying Close Initiative

3.1. The numbers of young people in 16+ supported accommodation has increased significantly since April 2021, when there were 60 young people in 16+ supported accommodation. By September 2022 there were 89 young people in 16+ supported accommodation. Of these, 60 are children in care and 29 are care leavers.

3.2. The increase in the number of young people in 16+ supported accommodation is projected to continue over the next period. This is due to the increase in UASC aged 16+ and in the number of children in residential and foster care moving to supported accommodation.

3.3. Each year, around 40 care leavers age 18 are supported by specialist housing workers for young people based in District Councils. This includes care leavers seeking early advice and support in relation to housing options and others whose placement or accommodation has broken down, putting them at risk of homelessness.

3.4. In October 2022, the average weekly cost for supported accommodation was at the following levels:

- The average weekly placement cost for those young people living in On Framework provisions is £2,047.
- The average weekly placement cost for those young people living in Off Framework provisions is £3,535.

3.5 The costs are lower for 18-year-olds as illustrated in the table below, however these are likely to rise in future years.

Type of Placement	Number	Average Cost/Week
Support Living Provider	31	£1551
Residential Children's Home	5	£5,434
Cost per person for Staying Close model	12 in year 1 24 in year 2	£615

3.6 As of January 2023, Devon County Council (DCC) had 31 care experienced young people aged 18 or above in supported accommodation placements through our Supported Living Options framework, and five 18-year-olds in residential children's homes. They remained in these settings because they were not ready to move into independent living, social housing, or other move on options.

3.7 Feedback from providers and front-line workers is that move on from residential children’s homes and supported accommodation is a challenge for the following reasons:

- Finding suitable options for young people with high support needs, including young people in need of mental health support.
- High levels of demand for housing, particularly in Exeter where there are more employment and education opportunities.
- Young people who come into care at a late age, 17 or older, and require at least 6 months in a stable environment before they are ready to consider move-on options.

3.8 The anticipated continued pressure on sufficiency of supported accommodation and children’s homes illustrates the need for good move on options for those who are not ready for independent living at the age of 18. The introduction of OFSTED registration for supported accommodation providers for 16-17 year-olds from October 2023 may also reduce sufficiency for this age group. Moving 18 year-olds into more appropriate accommodation will create more sufficiency for all age groups.

3.9 Securing move on accommodation with appropriate levels of support for care experienced young people will have a number of benefits:

- Reduced use of homeless accommodation for care leavers, including B and Bs.
- Better supportive pathways for children as they leave care and become independent reducing cost in the long-term.
- Good quality accommodation for young people to support the transition to independence.
- Increase availability of 16-17 supported accommodation for children in care as 18+ young people will be able to move to more independent options.
- Reduced use of high cost supported accommodation for 18+ care experienced young people.

3.10 The council is working closely with housing providers to identify properties that will be suitable for the Staying Close programme. These are progressing well and as soon as a suitable property is identified local elected members will be consulted.

3.11 The aim is to open between 2-3 buildings between October and December 2023, with a further 2-3 buildings opening between January 2024 and December 2024.

3.12 The DFE revenue allocation is for 2 years, as follows:

2023/24	2024/25	Total
£382,369.00	£764,737.00	£1,147,106.00

3.13 As the Staying Close model reduces use of high cost supported accommodation and residential care for care experienced young people aged 18+ it is expected that the project will deliver significant long-term savings for the council. This aspect of the project will be closely evaluated over the next 2 years.

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4 Next Steps

- 4.6 The council will publish a Finance letter in May 2023 for approval of the revised capital spend for the Welland and Barnes Children's Homes projects. Tender award will follow subject to this decision and these capital projects are due to be completed by December 2023.
- 4.7 The tender documentation for The Link Centre will be finalised alongside further consultation on this project.
- 4.8 A Cabinet Report on the Staying Close initiative will be considered at the July Cabinet meeting. This report will seek approval for the project and the recruitment of staff to deliver the project.

Background Information

Scrutiny Committee Homes for Children's Presentation

Scrutiny Committee Staying Close Presentation

Report of the Children's Standing Overview Group of Tuesday 18th April 2023

1. Introduction

The Standing Overview Group of the Children's Scrutiny Committee meets regularly as an informal information sharing and member development session where issues are presented to the councillors to raise awareness and increase knowledge. The Standing Overview Group considers key updates and pertinent issues from across different services, with the aim of developing Members' knowledge, and bringing to the forefront any areas which may benefit from further scrutiny.

Any action points arising from the sessions are reported back to the next formal Committee meeting.

This report outlines the topic(s) covered at the meeting of Tuesday 18th April 2023, highlights the key points raised during discussion and details any agreed actions.

2. Recommendation(s)

The Children's Scrutiny Committee accepts this report as an accurate record of the meeting and agrees the outlined actions raised during the discussion including the addition of the highlighted issues of concern to the future work programme.

3. Attendance

Scrutiny Members: Councillors Rob Hannaford (Chair), Janet Bradford, Phil Bullivant, Frank Letch, Lois Samuel and Ms Claire Platt.

Cabinet Member for Children's Services and Schools: Councillor Andrew Leadbetter.

Children's Services Officers: Steve Liddicott (Deputy Director – Head of Children's Health and Wellbeing), Jo Siney (Head of Service – Disabled Children's Service), Vikki Hearn (Head of Service – Children's Commissioning and Resources), Paul Williamson (Children's Commissioning) and Glen Lobb (Service Manager - Countywide Services).

Special Advisor: Melanie John Ross.

Scrutiny Officer: Charlie Fisher.

4. Summary of Discussion

4.1 Short Breaks for Disabled Children and Direct Payments Review

The report of Jo Siney (Head of Service, Disabled Children's Service) set out the work being undertaken by the Short Breaks Project Board to develop and improve the local offer

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of short breaks for disabled children and young people. The Head of Service's presentation appraised Members of short breaks, the current position in Devon, the future aims, commissioning intentions, key areas of work, the revised Direct Payment Guidance and the proposed timescales.

The report was originally scheduled at the Committee meeting of Tuesday 14th March (Minute item 89), but the Committee resolved to defer the item to the Standing Overview Group meeting.

Across Devon, 1735 children and young people are supported by the Disabled Children's Service (DCS). Of which, 1439 are supported with short break support from the DCS Support and Advice Teams. 1403 children and young people are supported by Direct Payments. The Council's annual spend is around £5m.

The Head of Service appraised Members of the current challenges with the Council's current approach to short breaks and direct payments. The Head of Service highlighted that the Council is over-reliant on direct payments to provide short breaks and many families are unable to make short break arrangements through direct payments, and therefore not supported in the way the service hopes. Families report that they are unable to find local activities where their children are welcome and included (creating reliance on 1:1 support increasing market sufficiency issues and reliance on high-cost options) and there are difficulties with recruiting enablers with the skills needed to support our families. In addition, the number of families being supported through Disabled Children's Service is very high, impacting on ability of service to provide support and review for families most in need.

The key areas of work brought to the attention of Members included:

- Development of a Short Break Commissioning Strategy 2021-25 to deliver the commissioning intentions which have been developed in partnership with families across a wide range of consultation.
- The intention of a graduated support offer of short breaks provision. The lowest level of support would be advice and guidance, moving to families being able to access local, community and inclusive activities. The Disabled Children's Service would identify families who need additional support and co-ordinate that support.
- Improvements to practice and to supporting families. This includes a new helpline for advice and improving short breaks assessments to be more holistic to look at the needs of children and parents/carers.
- Direct Payments improvement plan with specific actions to improve controls and measures as recommended by Devon Audit Partnership in their review. The Devon Audit Partnership highlighted the Direct Payments Policy was out of date and needed to be reviewed. This work has included a review of our Direct Payment Guidance which has been updated to ensure it provides the guidance needed for families and professionals.

The Head of Service highlighted that the work, notwithstanding the feedback from this meeting with Members, is ready for final approval with implementation of the new Direct Payments Guidance from May 2023.

Discussion and questions with Members included the following areas:

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- The views of service users (children, young people and families) in any potential changes to their plans – The Head of Service responded that there is a balance and officers have been trying to make sure changes happen at a steady and sensitive pace, keeping families up to date and ensuring families remain confident in the support they are receiving. DCS are working with families so they know that the service is working with the community offer and there are community offers that are a positive step forward and inclusive for families. Feedback from families has been overwhelmingly positive and have opted in to being kept informed on plans. The Head of Service also recognised that there will be families who may be worried and this was one of the reasons for having a helpline for advice and showing the service is a listening service. As the service develops through its commissioning strategy, the Head of Service highlighted that families would be part of that process to co-design work and build the confidence and trust of families.
- Timescales and the pace of change for this work - The Head of Service commented that pace of change is something that families have fed back and make improvements. There has been a need to get the momentum back into this work and the pace is intended to be fast but understanding that the full procurement exercise would take around 12 to 18 months. During this time, work is ongoing with the community and organisations to help them to make an offer for disabled children, inclusive support and gaps.
- Considering the rural nature of Devon to ensure access across all of Devon – The commissioning strategy seeks to understand the current provision in Devon and part of the mapping work and feedback from families has been about discovering organisations that could become part of the Short Break provider network. Services in rural areas are often at a travelable distance and transport plays a factor in access. The Head of Service welcomed Councillors in sharing local groups or knowledge to the service to help. The service wants to use the rurality and beauty of Devon including coastal and countryside areas to children to be able to access all of Devon e.g. a surf club in North Devon working to give disabled children access to the sea.
- Joint commissioning work with health partners in respect of children with complex medical needs – Members were advised that an ICB lead commissioner is on the Short Breaks Commissioning Board and is enthusiastic about opportunities for joint commissioning. The service has a good working relationship with the ICB and work with the ICB on joint commissioning arrangements for children and individual packages for residential short breaks for children with complex needs.
- Devon's over-reliance on direct payments and barriers to unlocking services in Children's Services – The Head of Service responded that developing a graduate response relies on a welcoming and inclusive community to support meeting the needs of children. This takes time to build up the skills and confidence of organisations to be able to offer provision to children. Part of the management of finite resources has been to put in criteria or steps to accessing support. But the aim is to change to build confidence and training.
- Indicators to show if the goals are being met – The Head of Service commented that the service would want to hear that families know how to access support and are

able to access that support appropriately and that support makes a difference. An indicator would be the numbers of children accessing inclusive opportunities. For the service, less escalation of need and less escalation of families who cannot cope or need more support would show support is right and making a difference. Scrutiny can keep track on being clear about the service's resources, the promotion of inclusion and that support is making a difference to families.

- Engagement with the Bridges Service – The services have worked together and Bridges have upskilled their staff, particularly around autism so they can understand what makes a difference to families.
- Access to holiday activities – The Parent Carer Forum has fed back on this and officers are regularly meeting to look at problem solving difficulties accessing support and being more inclusive. The definition of inclusive varies and disabled children are a hidden group and so awareness is not common. The service want to explore what is possible rather than what isn't possible.

Members were content with the rationale behind proposals and vision and welcomed the positive work of the Head of Service and her team. Members particularly praised the commitment and understanding of the Head of Service. The Chair asked if Members could be updated with further information on this work in around 6 months time.

4.2 Homes for Children Update

Vikki Hearn (Head of Service, Commissioning and Resources) presented to Members on the current picture of placements and the development of new placements.

Pertinent information on our children in care included (as of 29th March 2023):

- There were 892 Children in Care.
- By largest types of placement, 603 were placed in Foster & Kinship, 104 in residential, 80 in semi-independent unregulated and 43 parental responsibility.
- By placement provision, 457 were in DCC provision and 331 in private provision.
- By Permanency Plan type: 398 in long term fostering, 118 return to family, 108 unknown, 67 adoption, 57 SGO and 56 long term residential.
- Of the 104 in residential care, 42% were placed outside of Devon County Council for a number of different reasons.
- 13 were in unregistered placements.
- The average cost of a placement in residential care had increased from £4844 per week in 2020/21 to £5,901 per week, which was around the national average. High cost placements were costing on average £12,358 per week.

The Head of Service appraised Members of the improvement actions and activity within the service to improve sufficiency. This included focusing on internal provision and building placements, working with providers to better manage our young people and a better system and processes to secure placements and track children and young people on their journey. The Council was successful in Wave 2 of the DfE Capital Fund, securing £733,354 and has bid for Wave 3 funding for the Staying Close programme, which the Council is awaiting the outcome for.

The Children's Home Capital Projects presents an opportunity to break the negative cycle of our current placements that are high cost and not always appropriate and expand on our already rated 'Good' Children's Homes. By converting Barnes Children's Home into a 2-unit residential home, Welland to a 2 bedroom home and converting the Link Centre (Holsworthy) into 3 semi-independent flats, the service will be able to find suitable, cost-effective accommodation for some of our most complex children in need whilst the service works with them. Welland and Barnes are already Ofsted registered so just need variation orders on their beds. Other possibilities for other DCC owned property exists, such as emergency beds and 16 to 18 supported living. The service's plans for the 'Staying Close' bid is to secure 4 properties across Devon to allow 24 young people to living in self-contained rooms/flats, with personal advisors on site. The plans are not reliant on the Wave 3 bid, but capital funding would allow for the project to progress faster.

Discussion and questions with Members included the following areas:

- Members welcomed the work to build more places. Children's Scrutiny has been advocating for more in house provision for many years, evidenced in their Budget commentaries from previous years – The Cabinet Member commented that it was something he supported to reduce the number the Council sends out of county and unregistered placements. The Cabinet Member commented that the work has taken some time to organise and Officers commented that progress is now being made and they hoped that progress would be fast.
- The long-term budgetary implications of in house provisions – Officers responded that having more in house provision is not a 'cheap' option but there is an opportunity to focus on quality and the outcomes of children and young people. But in house provisions to allow for some savings when considering social worker visits and access to local services. Our current homes are rated 'Good' from Ofsted and Officers commented that should be reassuring to Members because Officers would expect that quality to continue.
- Working with communities near to local homes to reassure local people and providers, especially during the planning process – Members raised that the planning process and location of homes is sensitive and local people have concerns but more needs to be done to promote the homes as a service to young people and any negative connotations. The Head of Service commented that services need to include local communities as they play a role in bringing up children and young people. Officers commented that the planning process for providers can be very difficult and very costly.
- The work of the Corporate Parenting Strategic Board on children in care and permanency planning – The Cabinet Member responded that the board had been relaunched and he would appraise the Chair of the work at a future meeting with the new Head of Service.
- Members questioned the number of additional beds in respect of the actual number of beds Devon needs and the projections needed in our sufficiency plans – The Head of Service commented that the sufficiency strategy does need further work and improved data sets to understand our needs. The plans detailed today include 8 beds and up to 24 for Staying Close, but that this is the first step. Caution was needed to ensure the service understand our needs and can plan what is needed to

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build. Part of the wider strategy is building family provisions, more foster parents and therapeutic foster parenting. The Head of Service offered to bring the Sufficiency Strategy back to the Committee.

The Chair positively welcomed the work of the Head of Service and Officers and offered his support to any future Cabinet reports on the work, on behalf of the Committee. The Chair asked for a future update to Members in around 6 months on this work.

5. Next Meeting

The Chair noted that the next meeting of the Children's Scrutiny Committee meeting is scheduled for Tuesday 6th June 2023.

The meeting began at 3pm and ended at 4:29pm.

Councillor Rob Hannaford
Chair, Children's Scrutiny Committee

Electoral Divisions: All

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