

Report of the Cabinet Member
Children's Services and Schools

I have been asked to Report as follows for Full Council on 16 February 2023:

1. By Councillor Letch as follows:

- a) Have any Devon children been sent to the Bradford Children's Home or any other centre with an Ofsted report which is not good in the past 5 years?
- b) Where are Devon children currently accommodated out of county (numbers and locations)?
- c) What financial help do we offer to those members of the family who wish to visit out of county children and who would struggle to pay for the journey?
- d) If we have a financial help programme how is it advertised and administered?

2. By Councillor Connett as follows:

What actions the County Council is taking to welcome new foster parents?

3. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

The MacAlistair Review of Children's Social Care, the Council's analysis of the recommendations, the Government response and how the Council will implement the action points.

4. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

An update on our Child Friendly Devon initiative.

5. By Councillor Hannaford as follows:

Children's Services OFSTED Letter outcome, in addition to the media release, including the positive areas of progress.

6. By Councillor Aves as follows:

Please can the Cabinet member report on the following for this financial year 2022/23:

- a) How much was spent on consultants for Children's services and from which budget was it paid?
- b) What consultants did you employ and for what advice?
- c) For Children's Services what was the total spend on agency staff and how much was spent on permanent staff?

7. By Councillor Aves as follows:

- a) How are you making sure all parent/carers are receiving the information they need on any changes to Disabled Children and Young People services?
- b) Much of what is online is still not accessible enough or easy to navigate.

- c) Communication from the Disabled Children and Young People Services needs to be accessible and not just online as parents and carers are so very busy looking after their families that they need to be told what is happening.
- d) So much work has been done by officers recently to listen to families to improve the services which is commendable, so, what are you doing to make sure the short breaks and respite are suitable and being put in place fast enough to benefit all the children and young people by the end of this academic year at the latest?
- e) This was being talked about years ago, before the pandemic, and these families are still waiting. At that time I went to a session in Wonford with the officers to hear what parents and carers needed to support them and their children and young people. Why is this not already in place?

8. By Councillor Adams as follows:

Please may I have a report from the Portfolio holder for Children's Services (CS) on the following concerns from the recent OFSTED report 30/1/23:

- a) How are the children who come into DCC care going to be assured, in a more timely manner than at present, of arrangements for a permanent and secure home?
- b) How are CS management and IROS going to ensure that permanence for children in care is a top priority for social workers?
- c) How are CS management going to ensure that parents are invited to discussions about options for their children and how will this be a transparent process?
- d) How will the handover of important documentation be improved between social workers, in the light of the high turnover of social workers and how will they have command of the key issues?
- e) How will the regulations, procedures, assessments, delays and checks be improved for our children in care?
- f) How will all records be improved to become sharp and clear in all cases. How will this consistency be improved and achieved?
- g) How will DCC ensure permanent and stable leadership in Children's Services?
- h) How many agency staff are employed in CS compared to permanent staff? What is the data on this? What is the extra financial cost incurred by the use of agency staff for the Council?

9. By Councillor Whitton as follows:

Will the Cabinet Member please provide a report on the approximate number of seats on school transport sold to families at the current rate of £600 per seat per annum, and the total income this provides to the authority?

Will the Cabinet Member also provide an assessment of the amount expected to be raised by the proposed increase in the concessionary rate to £800 per seat per term and explain whether any calculations have been made in arriving at this figure as to the number of families currently purchasing a seat who would no longer do so at the higher rate?

10. By Councillor Bailey as follows:

Please provide a Cabinet Member report on the LADO (local authority designated officer) service and supply any reports that have been brought forward to cabinet or childrens scrutiny on the resourcing, function and performance of this service over the past 7 years.

Responses

1. Poor Ofsted Reports and Bradford Childrens Home

- a) Devon County Council have not placed any children with Bradford Children's home. 2 children have been placed in Children's Homes in Devon that have been rated inadequate in the past 5 years, and one in a home in Somerset, although all three homes have improved.

Provider	Provision	Overall Effectiveness	Last date of Inspection
Blue Elephant (Devon)	Burrough Farm	Requires Improvement	22 June 2022
Mutual Care (Devon)	Vennbridge	Requires Improvement	24 August 2022
Impact for Change (Somerset)	Holly Farm	Good	27 & 28 August 2022

In respect of the three Devon home providers, we know them to be well established and we have previously placed many young people with them. These providers have all previously delivered a robust offer that have achieved good outcomes. We are confident that where an 'Inadequate' OFSTED judgement has been made, this was the result of specific events within the home and not systemic issues. Following implementation of the agreed actions plans, all the homes listed above addressed the shortfalls identified by Ofsted. All of the homes secured improved judgements when they were subsequently inspected by OFSTED.

There are no out of county homes where we have young people placed that are currently rated inadequate. In the past 5 years we have not placed a young person in a home out of county that has an existing inadequate rating. Where a home has been rated inadequate during a period that a child has been in placed our placements team with input from social workers have reassessed the risk of the child staying in place and where appropriate they will have found alternative suitable provision.

We are required to consider the best interests of a child and it may be considered appropriate for a young person to remain in a rated inadequate home as part of the child's care plan.

The County Council works closely with our providers to address quality concerns through a quality monitoring process. This process includes regular quality monitoring meetings with the provider to monitor the progress made against the provider's action plan. For each young person, their social worker ensures that there is a robust safety plan in place, which includes increased visits and oversight of the young person's placement.

b) The table below shows where we have children in placements out of the County.

Placement Type (by LA of Placement)	Children's Homes	Fostering	Supported Living	Grand Total
Barnet		3		3
Birmingham		1	1	2
Blackpool	1		1	2
Brent	1	1	1	3
Bridgend		2		2
Bristol, City of		3		3
Calderdale	1			1
Cambridgeshire		1		1
Camden		1		1
Cornwall	2	31		33
Croydon		2	3	5
Cumbria	1			1
Denbighshire	2			2
Dorset	2	2		4
Ealing	1			1
Essex	1	1		2
Gloucestershire			1	1
Hampshire	2			2
Herefordshire, County of	2			2
Hertfordshire	1	1		2
Kent	1	4		5
Lambeth		1		1
Lancashire	1		1	2
Luton		3		3
Newport	1			1
North Northamptonshire	1			1
North Somerset		5		5
Northumberland	1			1
Plymouth		19	3	22

Powys	1			1
Redbridge		2		2
Rhondda Cynon Taf		1		1
Solihull		1		1
Somerset	9	14	4	27
Staffordshire	1		4	5
Stockton-on-Tees		1		1
Swindon		1	1	2
Telford and Wrekin		2		2
Torbay	5	38	11	54
Wakefield			1	1
Waltham Forest		1		1
Warwickshire		3		3
West Northamptonshire	1			1
Worcestershire	1			1
Grand Total	40	145	32	217

- c) We do not advertise financial help. Financial help is considered by social workers through the assessment and placement panel. Financial assistance may be available to families who wish to visit children out of county from the placements budget. Any support offered is dependent on the situation and needs of each individual child and is decided on that basis. We have improved our processes to ensure that there is rigorous oversight in place to ensure that authorising managers make consistent financial decisions within a clear scheme of delegation.
- d) We do not have a specific financial help programme because each child's situation and needs are considered on an individual basis.

2. Welcoming New Foster Parents

All applicants to Fostering Devon are matched to and linked with an experienced foster carer. This peer mentor supports the prospective carer through the period of preparation and assessment and into their role as newly approved carers. This is through answering questions, providing helpful resources, talking through the rewards and potential challenges of the role and meeting up with the fostering household when appropriate.

Every prospective carer is provided with a 4 day in person training course: 'The Skills to Foster'. This gives information on all aspects of fostering, learn about the role and expectations, allows them to meet experienced carers and others in the team around a child, hear from our care experienced children and young people and confirm that fostering is something that will suit their household.

We have recently introduced a 5th session on 'The Skills to Foster' course – an interactive session with several of our children in care, participation team members and assessing social workers. This means that prospective foster carers hear first-hand from our young people about their lived experience and importantly, our young people are directly involved in the assessment of prospective carers.

All applicants are invited to an online monthly learning workshop and support group. This offers additional preparation learning and provides an opportunity to get together informally with other prospective carers in the assessment process.

All applicants are allocated their own assessing social worker who not only is assessing them but provides lots of resources to help prepare them for the role of foster carer. All applicants have at least one learning session with one of our Promoting Stability Team members to assist with their understanding of a relational and therapeutic based approach to their care.

Working together as a management group, we are currently in the process of finalising written guidance to the transition period from prospective carers to newly approved foster carers. This will allow for an earlier introduction to their Supporting supervising social worker, a joint approach between the assessing and supervising team in relation to matching for their 1st child coming to the home and a smoother, more supportive handover at a time which can be very challenging for new carers. This will be completed over the next 2 month period and in place from 1st April.

3. MacAlistair Review of Children's Social Care

The MacAlistair Review was published on 22 May 2022 which has been followed up by the government's strategy 'Stable Homes, Built on Love' which was published on 2 February 2023 which is open for consultation until 11 May 2023. The Review has significant recommendations and I would welcome Children's Scrutiny's exploration of the implications for Devon.

4. Child Friendly Devon

Devon County Council's strategic plan sets out its commitment to being Child Friendly. We have been learning from other local authorities about their Child Friendly work, I recently visited Leeds to speak directly to the Child Friendly Leeds team and officers have already met with Leeds and colleagues from Warwickshire. Listening to the voice of children, young people and families is key to our understanding of what a child friendly county should look like. We have reached out to more than 150,000 people and received over 1,000 responses across a range of events and activities. This includes working together with of our Stand Up Speak Up, care experienced children and young people and our Youth Parliamentarians. We are also grateful for the continued support of the Children's Scrutiny Committee and their recommendations from their report.

We have brought together all of the feedback we have received so that we can develop a sustainable plan to ensure that we work with our partners, stakeholders, businesses, services, educators and community groups to make Devon the best place to grow up so that this is the county that creates big dreams and bright futures for our children, young people and families.

It has been really important that our new Chief Executive has the chance to see the work we have done so far and that she is part of planning how we can drive this work forward across our communities. Young people have told us what they want, we now need to get on with engaging others and delivering outcomes.

5. Children's Services OFSTED

Children's Services OFSTED Letter outcome, in addition to the media release, including the positive areas of progress.

The most recent Social Care Ofsted Inspection Report was published on 30 January 2023. I acknowledge that as a Council, we still have a long way to go to ensure that we routinely produce the evidence to Ofsted that our services are moving at the pace that they would like to see. However, we must also build on the positive aspects of the report. Our front-line managers are described as having “energy and commitment to implementing improvement plans”, and I am confident that with the arrival of Julian Wooster who recently led his previous service from inadequate to good, there is an opportunity for us to learn from his experience.

The report confirmed that no child was identified to be at immediate risk of significant harm, but consistency of good practice across the workforce, and oversight of the care and support young people receive were still falling short.

We are immediately addressing the permanency of arrangements for young people and we acknowledge that we can do more to secure options such as Special Guardianship Orders.

It is disappointing to me that Ofsted have again identified inconsistency in the quality of social work practice, including frontline management decisions.

Our immediate actions to tackle this has been through the implementation of a re shaped permanent and stable leadership team at head of service level. The reshape will ensure that children are supported more effectively by our teams and that the strengthened head of service tier will bring greater rigour and oversight so that the quality of assessments becomes more consistent and are completed in a timely way.

We are working tirelessly to reduce the number of vacancies and to improve our ratio of permanent staff. This will in time address consistency in ensuring that children and young people can build and grow a relationship with their social worker. Ofsted acknowledged that more social workers were choosing to stay working in Devon which they recognised to be a positive shift. Alongside this, they mentioned that caseloads are becoming more manageable which is very welcome but requires constant monitoring by the leadership team.

The report highlighted some very positive work that we are doing with young people. They saw clear evidence that we are listening to recommendations from young people who are, or who have been in their care, about how to improve children's services and that they could clearly see that children are actively involved in shaping the service and holding corporate parents to account. Inspectors specifically noted that children and young people's suggestions and representations are being taken seriously and implemented.

In addition, for disabled children who have short breaks in children’s homes to provide respite for their parents or carers, Ofsted praised our social workers and told us that they demonstrate a good grasp of our disabled children and young people’s evolving needs and how they communicate.

Ofsted looked at the work of our Independent Reviewing Officers, who monitor the care that young people are getting. Again, they acknowledged improvement in this area and remarked that they are increasingly confident in challenging or escalating issues when there has been delay in planning for children, and this is leading to improved outcomes for these children.

I also would like to mention the high praise for the work of the service in responding to supporting unaccompanied children asylum seekers and the work of the whole council in their reaction to supporting these families.

We are not the same council as we were when Ofsted first assessed our children’s services as inadequate in 2020 but it’s clear that there has not been enough improvement and it is not being delivered quickly enough.

Julian’s arrival gives me great confidence that he knows what it takes to deliver the improvement required in Devon. I can already see from talking to staff, how his approach to bringing senior leaders together and ensuring staff are supported to do their jobs well, he has instantly changed the atmosphere and energy around the service.

With our new senior leadership, and with more focus than ever before on working with young people for young people, we will continue to work hard to drive the improvements needed to give the best possible start in life and the best opportunities for all our young people in this county. I want to acknowledge the recent wider corporate response in diverting resource to support children’s services so that together, we demonstrate that we are truly putting children and families at the heart of the whole council’s work.

We will also continue to work with the Government, our Commissioner and all our partners on delivering the outcomes for children that we all want to see.

6. Consultants for Children’s services and spend on staff and agency staff

Total Spend on agency and permanent staff 22/23		
Type of Spend	Social Care	Education & Learning
	Spend 1st April to 31st January	Spend 1st April to 31st January
	£'000	£'000
Permanent Staff	40,858	7,539
Agency Staff	14,822	1,325
Total	55,680	8,864

Notes
 Figures exclude 100% traded services as all fully recoverable
 Education and Learning excludes DSG and other schools' grants

Role	Spend 1st April to 31st January (£)	Service	Budget Paid From	Notes
Youth Justice Senior Consultant	87,000	Children's Social Care	Strategic Management Budget	
Interim Youth Justice Head of Service	80,000	Children's Social Care	Strategic Management Budget	
Corporate Parenting Improvement Lead	75,000	Children's Social Care	Strategic Management Budget	
Early Help Consultant	119,000	Children's Social Care	Restorative Transformation Budget / Strategic Management Budget	Partly funded by DfE grant
Ofsted Preparation	100,000	Children's Social Care	Restorative Transformation Budget / Strategic Management Budget	Partly funded by DfE grant
Interim Children's Improvement Support	112,000	Children's Social Care	Restorative Transformation Budget / Strategic Management Budget	Partly funded by DfE grant
Interim Improvement Director	119,000	Children's Social Care	Restorative Transformation Budget / Strategic Management Budget	Partly funded by DfE grant
Project Manager	101,000	Children's Social Care	Restorative Transformation Budget / Strategic Management Budget	Partly funded by DfE grant
Children's Workforce Development Lead	109,000	Children's Social Care	Strategic Management Budget	
Practice Improvement Lead	110,000	Children's Social Care	I-People BCP Teams	
SEND Deputy Director	113,000	Education Service	Strategic Management Budget	
Head of Education (Strategy)	15,000	Education Service	Strategic Management Budget	
	1,140,000			

The indicative additional cost to the Council of using agency staff as opposed to permanent staff if the level of agency ran at 85 for the full year (current agency social worker number), would be £3.7 million.

7. Disabled Children and Young People Services and Communication

Much of what has been raised is referenced in our improvement plan. Our improvement plan has a clear governance structure where we are held to account for our improvement journey in forums such as Improvement Partnership Board chaired by our DfE Commissioner, progress is also monitored in our monthly Quality, Practice Review Meeting chaired by our Interim DCS (Julian Wooster) and attended by our tier 2, 3 and 4 leadership groups. We report regularly to Children's Scrutiny Committee and at our next Scrutiny meeting officers will be covering our response to the most recent Ofsted Monitoring visit in detail which will cover Cllr Adams and Cllr Aves report request.

With regards to a permanent and stable leadership team – we are currently advertising for the DCS and Deputy Chief Officer post. We have recently recruited a permanent tier 3 leadership team recruiting successfully to 9 out of 10 posts.

8. Concerns from the recent OFSTED report 30/1/23

Much of what has been raised is referenced in our improvement plan. Our improvement plan has a clear governance structure where we are held to account for our improvement journey in forums such as Improvement Partnership Board chaired by our DfE Commissioner, progress is also monitored in our monthly Quality, Practice Review Meeting chaired by our Interim DCS (Julian Wooster) and attended by our tier 2, 3 and 4 leadership groups. We report regularly to Children's Scrutiny Committee and at our next Scrutiny meeting officers will be covering our response to the most recent Ofsted Monitoring visit in detail which will cover Cllr Adams and Cllr Aves questions below.

With regards to a permanent and stable leadership team – we are currently advertising for the DCS and Deputy Chief Officer post. We have recently recruited a permanent tier 3 leadership team recruiting successfully to 9 out of 10 posts.

I can add that we have 85 agency social workers front door services and 120 perm social workers currently, so 43.6% are agency.

9. School Transport Policy, Consultation and Income.

There are currently 444 chargeable Post 16 passengers and 163 concessionary passengers, a total of 607 passengers.

The budgeted income in the 2022/23 financial year is £297,000. The anticipated increase in income in the 2023/24 financial year is £63,000 reflecting the increase will not come into effect until September 2023, the start of the 2023/24 academic year. A full year effect of this increase is anticipated to be in the region of £95,000.

This anticipated increase in income is lower than the full impact across all 607 passengers reflecting that some may find alternative transport arrangements.

Concessionary passengers utilise spare seats on contracted transport and any drop off in numbers would be a direct loss of income. However, some routes do have waiting lists. For Post 16 passengers there may be some savings in transport costs for the County Council should a passenger no longer travel on our contracted transport. These savings have not been calculated.

10. LADO (local authority designated officer) Service and Committee Reports

The LADO Annual Report has been uploaded onto the Devon Children and Families Partnership Annual Report page <https://www.dcfp.org.uk/document/annual-report-on-safeguarding-arrangements-2021-22/>. The link can be accessed from section 6 – but the direct link to the Report is here - [Education and skills websites - LADO Report 21-22 Annual report Final.pdf - All Documents \(sharepoint.com\)](#)

Copies of all agendas, report and minutes that are presented to Cabinet and Children's Scrutiny are available on the website – the function is available to search by Committee, key word and a range of dates - <https://democracy.devon.gov.uk/iedocsearch.aspx?adv=1&fc=1&SS=Text%20to%20search%20for>

Andrew Leadbetter

Cabinet Member

Children's Services and Schools