

Children's Services – Q3 2023/24

Summary of progress on Council Priorities, issues arising, and achievements

Early Help and Social Care

Inspection of East Sussex Children's Services

The inspection of the Council Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) Inspections took place from 11 – 15 December. This was a short inspection. The inspection report was published 6 February, and we were awarded an overall effectiveness grading of Good with the experiences and progress of children in care graded as Outstanding. The report notes that *'Children in East Sussex continue to receive consistently strong and effective support' and 'Social workers know the children they support exceptionally well. They are insightful and attuned to children's needs, helping them to express their views using individualised and bespoke communication methods.'* The judgement grades are set out below. 3 areas for improvement were identified and these are included in the report on the inspection finding which is included in the agenda for the 5 March Cabinet meeting.

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Good
The experiences and progress of children in care	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Review of modelling and placements

Children's Services has continued to work with IMPOWER in Q3. We have focused on:

- implementation of the valuing care model
- enhancing strategies in relation to development of our in house foster carer offer
- placement sufficiency to improve our ability to secure the right care for the right child for the right length of time

We have made progress in developing a reunification framework to support children to return home where it is safe and appropriate to do so. We have done this through:

- weekly valuing care panels assessing the appropriateness of current placements for children
- removal of barriers to achieve positive change for children
- establishing more commissioning capacity within the service to ensure improved value for money

This work will achieve actual cost savings of £299,692 in Q4 23/24 and has identified an estimated further £82,401 savings in the same period. Further savings have been identified for 2024/25 (£592,751 of actual savings and £2,367,077 of identified estimate savings).

Family Hubs

In Q3 we opened 2 new family hubs in Shinewater and Devonshire in Eastbourne. These are the latest of 11 family hubs that the Council opened in 2023. Visitors to the 2 hubs can get support and advice from midwives, health visitors, early communications support workers, early years practitioners and more. Activity sessions will give children, parents and carers the chance to socialise and support their children's needs and development.

The focus in Q3 has been on recruitment and staff development in three areas:

- Peri-natal mental health and parent/infant relationships. Recruitment has included senior infant mental health practitioners, parent infant mental health specialists, additional community staff

nurses. 2 staff nurses were also recruited to deliver the ‘time for me post-natal support group which started in October.

- Infant feeding. Recruitment included two infant peer support co-ordinators and two community nursery nurses. We have also established the pilot feeding equipment loan scheme.
- Home learning. Recruited Early Years Practitioners to deliver Solihull post-natal groups. We also appointed Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Specialist Health Visitors to support the Small Beginnings groups.

Development of the Early Intervention Partnership Strategy

A series of workshops were held in Q3 with colleagues from the voluntary sector, NHS and education. These will inform the development of the new Early Intervention Partnership Strategy. The strategy will build on the strong partnerships and services already in place.

Principles and key deliverables have been collectively identified through engagement across the system. They will form the foundation for the delivery of this whole system early intervention offer. Our early intervention system is a network of services, processes and interactions that aim to help children, young people, and their families at the earliest opportunity.

This strategy is based on the understanding that investing in early intervention is the very best way to support families. There is not a statutory framework for Local Authorities to deliver early intervention. This means that we must work collaboratively with partners to deliver the very best that we can with the resources that we have.

We will publish the strategy in Q4.

New Child’s Plan

We have redesigned our plan for children and families where there is a Child in Need or Child Protection Plan in place. We worked with young people in the Youth Vocals group and the parent forum to develop the new plan. The plans now use more straightforward language, talk directly to families, and the structure is easier to understand for families to understand. This makes the records more meaningful to them in the future. It also keeps the child’s experience in mind when the social worker is writing the plan, and the family and professionals are reading the plan.

We launched the new child's plan at an event in November which 110 practitioners attended. This event stressed the importance of plans being specific, measurable and time bound and clearly setting out:

- what needs to change
- what tasks need to be undertaken and by whom
- what are the timescales

Social workers report that writing directly to the child and family has been transformational for some cases. This has resulted in improved engagement and progress of plans.

Children in Care Council

As part of National Care Leavers’ week, Coram Voice, a national charity, hosted an event for care-experienced young people from around the country on 25 October 2023. A National Voice, the national children in care council, organised the event to provide an opportunity for children in care councils to come together, share experiences and celebrate the amazing work that they do. Members of East Sussex Children in Care Council (CiCC) attended the event and came second for the Participation award.

The East Sussex CiCC were shortlisted for this award for their passion in promoting positive mental health, digital safety, and writing a sexuality and gender training session.

They have had an impact both locally and nationally.

- Locally they have been working to encourage adults to see things through the eyes of a looked after child. They have met with services, worked directly with young people and given views and ideas to how there could be more of a two-way relationship.
- They have contributed to the national agenda by attending meetings and sessions run by Coram Voice and Department for Education (DfE). They have used their experiences to highlight the need for change. For example, the 'stable homes built on love' project run by Coram Voice.

Newly Qualified Social Workers

The Council continues to be successful in recruiting and retaining newly qualified social workers. In November 2023 we celebrated the completion of 24 of our social workers' first year in practice. During the event managers provided feedback on the quality of their practice with themes of creativity, tenacity, warmth, having a caring attitude, being highly skilled, and being valued team players. They also described how these relatively inexperienced social workers are already making a very real, concrete difference to family's lives. Repeating this pattern was the successful recruitment of 26 newly qualified social workers who started the Assessed and Supported Year in Employment programme in September 2023. Again, the feedback so far is that this group of staff are hardworking, engaged and emotionally intelligent. They are also our most diverse cohort with over 30% being black, asian or minority ethnic practitioners.

Rate of Looked After Children (LAC) (per 10,000 children) and children on a child protection plan (CP Plan)

The rate of LAC (ref iii) has decreased in Q3, to 63.0 (671 children) from 64.4 (686 children) at Q2. This is in line with the target of 63.4 (676 children). Of the 671 children, 82 are unaccompanied asylum seeker children, an increase of five children from Q2. We are committed to enabling children to live with their families. To do this we work, where possible, through multi-agency support and planning.

There has been an increase in the rate of children with a CP Plan in Q3 from 63.0 per 10,000 (671 children) at Q2 to 70.6 (753 children). This is above the target of 62.0 (661 children). We continue to keep this under review with a range of actions to look at how this number can be safely managed down. The impact of such high numbers is significant on all agencies.

Education

What Next? Sussex Career Event

In October, the East Sussex Careers Hub hosted the online "What next?" event. "What Next?" connected young people and their families with careers experts and local employers. The event helped ensure that young people and their support networks have the information they need to make choices about their futures.

Employers joined educational, training and apprenticeship providers to highlight opportunities and explore all that Sussex has to offer to young people after GCSEs.

The "What Next" Sussex event included the chance to:

- speak to students and staff from sixth forms, colleges, and universities from across the region
- talk to a range of employers and apprenticeship providers from several industries and sectors
- discuss available options with qualified careers advisors

A sense of belonging - Supporting school leaders with Inclusion

Throughout Q3, the Education Division ran a series of training events. The events were aimed at school leaders and had a key focus on a sense of belonging. This provided an opportunity to focus on our collective ambition of inclusion, which is a key departmental priority. Our young people chose this theme, having told us that they feel most included at school when they experience a genuine sense of belonging.

The series included training events and the annual Schools Safeguarding conference. This was hosted in partnership with the East Sussex Safeguarding Children Partnership. Various speakers addressed attendees on different topics relating to safeguarding. Topics included the role of different partners in safeguarding, and anti-poverty practice.

We also organised the annual Inclusion Conference. This conference was targeted at our Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs). The SEND Young Ambassadors were among the keynote speakers, sharing their experiences. All attendees were able to access 3 workshops across the day. These topics included:

- supporting pupils experiencing Emotionally Based School Avoidance
- supporting LGBTQ+ pupils in schools
- how as an education community we can improve transition to secondary school

The training events aimed to ensure that school leaders at all levels are well equipped to create an inclusive culture in their schools. They also shared the latest information on, and best practices in, safeguarding and inclusion.

In October, we also facilitated a workshop on our new Inclusion Projects. The focus was on opportunities for schools to collaborate through these projects to enhance inclusive practices for children and young people with SEND. It brought together headteachers, School SENCOs, and Youth Voice Group members. The events were informative and an excellent platform for attendees to come together, share ideas and to shape the ongoing projects.

Ofsted outcomes for schools

The proportion of East Sussex special schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding is 91.7% (11/12) compared to the national average of 89.9%. There have been two new inspections published since Q2. The proportion of primary schools also remains above the national average at 91.9% (136/148), the national average is 90.7%.

The proportion of East Sussex secondary schools judged by Ofsted to be good or outstanding is 9.4 percentage points below the national average (ESCC: 73.1% (19/26) compared to the national average of 82.5%). As of 30 November 2023, there are seven secondary schools graded as requires improvement. Due to the Ofsted inspection cycle these schools will not be inspected for 2 1/2 years. The performance of academies in the Hastings and Bexhill area remains a significant concern. We continue to make strong representation to the Regional Director on the performance of these academy trusts.

The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 16 and academic age 17

4.1% of academic age 16 (Yr12) children were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Dec 2023 (**ref i**) compared to 3.4% in Dec 2022. Our target is less than 4%.

5.8% of academic age 17 (Yr13) children were Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) in Dec 2023 (**ref ii**) compared to 4.7% in Dec 2022. Our target is less than 6%.

We continue to have significant concerns about the lack of vocational/work-based learning offers for young people. We have raised this local and national concern with Ofsted, the DfE and the Education Skills and Funding Agency (ESFA).

The package of interim measures we are taking now includes:

- refocussing the newly re-commissioned Youth Employability Service Programme more closely on the NEET cohort
- encouraging existing providers to run January starts (where they have funded places remaining) to allow young people to start courses as soon as possible

- working with partner organisations on new programmes, including a targeted National Citizen Programme and a mentoring programme

By February 2024, ESFA, who fund 16-19 provision, will confirm if we have received funding for 250 plus additional places locally. We are meeting with local providers and potential new providers to deliver these new places.

Participation and strategic partnerships

Children and Young People's Partnership Trust

The East Sussex Children and Young People's Trust held an event with partners in November 2023. Partners heard from children and young people on the issues that matter to them. The event then focused on three key areas:

- climate change
- poverty proofing
- early help through social prescribing

The Children and Young People's Plan sets out how we will work together to improve outcomes for children and young people particularly those who are vulnerable to poor outcomes. The plan includes five priority areas. Overarching and cross cutting themes then run throughout all or most of the priority areas. The aim is for these to be clear in all our service delivery, commissioning and practice.

Youth Voice Groups

In Q3 our youth voice groups, Youth Cabinet and SEND Young Ambassadors, were supported to contribute to the Council's discussions as part of planning for 2024/25 onwards. They discussed what the Council is doing in two key priority areas for the young people:

- jobs, money and opportunities
- emotional wellbeing and mental health

This is part of the Council's Reconciling Policy, Performance and Resources process.

Revenue Budget Summary

The Departments net revenue budget is £119.772m, with a forecast overspend of £28.476m, an increase in the overspend of £5.462m from Q2 (**ref viii**).

The main area of projected overspend is in Early Help and Social Care of £27.924m, an increase of £4.602m from Q2 (**ref v**), this includes an internal transfer of £0.500m from Central Resources (**ref iv**) and £4.325m of COVID-19 funding.

There is an underspend within Central Resources of £0.076m, an increase of £0.441m from Q2, which includes the transfer of £0.500m to Early Help and Social Care.

There is an underspend of £0.497m in Education and ISEND, with a favourable movement of £0.517m from Q2 (**ref vi**) and an overspend of £1.125m in Communication, Planning and Performance, with an increase from Q2 of £0.936m (**ref vii**).

Central Resources reduction in underspend of £0.517m to £0.076m (ref iv)

This includes a movement of £0.500m from Central Resources to Early Help and Social Care to contribute to the increase in the National Minimum Allowances for foster carers and Special Guardianship Orders.

An additional £0.060m of brought forward departmental underspend has been given up in order to mitigate the departmental overspend at Q3.

Early Help and Social Care increased overspend of £4.602m to £27.924m (ref v)

The Home Office has confirmed additional funding for Asylum Seekers so this forecast has improved by £0.096m from Q2.

Early Help 0-19 is carrying some vacancies, which has improved the forecast by £0.064m from Q2.

Looked After Children (LAC) is projecting an additional £3.563m overspend from Q2 to £24.693m.

Children's Homes have decreased the projected overspend by £0.167m due to reducing the estimate of wraparound support required at Silver Birches.

The respite units at Dorset Road and Sorrel Drive are projecting additional pressure from Q2 of £0.520m, with Dorset Road having a reduction in staff costs following vacancies of £0.033m and Sorrel Drive projecting additional costs of £0.553m. Most of the Sorrel Drive costs are extensions to existing agency wraparound costs.

The main pressure is within External Residential costs, where an additional overspend of £2.799m is anticipated on top of that projected at Q2.

Q3 saw the numbers of children and young people requiring residential placements (which includes supported accommodation and secure accommodation) plateau at approx. 150 (this figure excludes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)). However, the complex care needs of a relatively small number of children mean that there are further pressures on this budget area (**refs xi and xii**). Several high-cost placements have been extended, causing the significant increase in forecast expenditure this quarter.

The projected underspend on Agency foster carers has reduced by £0.323m since Q2, as 16 new clients have been taken on during Q3, and 46 existing clients have increased cost changes. The in-house foster carers services underspend has increased by £0.187m since Q2, assuming current weekly payments remain constant for the remainder of 2023/24.

Further data quality improvements are being made and the service is working with Impower to support longer term placement sufficiency and identify opportunities for delivering improved care placement options for children and young people (i.e. foster care or reunifications with families) through the 'Valuing Care' approach and panels. This work will achieve actual cost savings of £299,692 in Q4 23/24 and has identified an estimated further £82,401 savings in the same period. Further savings have been identified in 2024/25 (£592,751 of actual savings and £2,367,077 of identified estimate savings).

Lansdowne is projecting an additional £0.254m overspend. Recruitment is progressing with the intention of opening the unit in Q4. A phased opening with increased occupancy rates was planned to start from 2nd January 2024, but this was delayed due to Ofsted registration timings. The unit is expected to reach breakeven point with six beds occupied at the pricing strategy agreed. It is expected to start to recover costs in 2024/25. Any further delay in opening will result in additional costs which cannot be recovered.

Localities is projecting an additional £1.090m of overspend:

The main reason for the increase is the higher projection for agency costs for long-term placements and other care of disabled children (£0.689m). The amount the agencies have been charging has increased and there is little alternative provision to choose from.

There is a forecast overspend of £309k within the Parent & Baby Placement service which is linked to the use of in-house fostering resources fall and the use of agency rise.

There has also been pressure within the St Leonards Family Support Team of £0.249m relating to court proceedings for one family.

Mitigations within Localities have included £0.283m of funding transferred from the Early Help 0-19 service to contribute to the increase in the National Minimum Allowance for SGOs.

CSD is exploring ways of mitigating the overall overspend budget projection including through efficient use of national grant funding and delaying filling vacancies where this would not impair cost avoidance. CSD is also reviewing whether all legitimate requests for NHS contributions to the funding of care packages have been made.

Communication, Planning and Performance: an increase in the overspend variance of £0.936m to £1.125m (ref vii):

There has been an increase of £0.064m within the Safeguarding service due to agency staff covering a permanent member of staff's long-term sickness plus relocation costs for a new staff member. This increase has been offset by a £0.070m decrease within the Planning & Performance Improvement service due to recruitment taking longer than expected.

There were other small movements within the Buzz Active, Organisational Development, and E Business services totalling £11k movement since Q2. Reductions of staff hours within Organisational Development has been offset by difficulty selling old kayak stock.

The major increase of £0.953m is within the Home to Schools Transport service. The new 2023/24 cohort started in September 2023, which also brought with it wage increases and higher fuel costs, resulting in increased contract costs. There is also a lack of market competition due to some operators leaving the market. The CSD team will be working closely with the CET transport service to explore all possible mitigations to reduce costs and to review further how CET forecasts produce the budget forecast.

Capital Programme Summary

The Capital Programme for 2023/24 is a £1.420m projected spend against a budget of £1.215m (**ref x**). The additional spend is the Council's contribution towards housing adaptations for disabled children's carers' homes (**ref ix**). These projects are funded by the disabled facilities grant managed by the districts and boroughs. This will be funded from Capital reserves.

Performance exceptions (See How to read this report for definition)**Priority – Driving sustainable economic growth**

Performance measure	Outturn 22/23	Target 23/24	RAG Q1 23/24	RAG Q2 23/24	RAG Q3 23/24	RAG Q4 23/24	Q3 23/24 outturn	Note ref
The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 16	New Measure	Less than 4%	G	G	A		4.1%	i
The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 17	New Measure	Less than 6%	G	G	A		5.8%	ii

Priority – Keeping vulnerable people safe

Performance measure	Outturn 22/23	Target 23/24	RAG Q1 23/24	RAG Q2 23/24	RAG Q3 23/24	RAG Q4 23/24	Q3 23/24 outturn	Note ref
Rate of Looked After Children (LAC) (per 10,000 children)	62.3 664 children	63.4 676 children	A	R	A		63.0 671 children	iii

Savings exceptions 2023/24 (£'000)

Service description	Original Target For 2023/24	Target including items c/f from previous year(s)	Achieved in-year	Will be achieved, but in future years	Cannot be achieved	Note ref
	-	-	-	-	-	
	-	-	-	-	-	
Total Savings	0	0	0	0	0	
			-	-	-	
			-	-	-	
Subtotal Permanent Changes ¹			0	0	0	
Total Savings and Permanent Changes	0	0	0	0	0	

Memo: treatment of savings not achieved in the year (£'000)	Temporary Funding ²	Part of reported variance ³	Total	Note Ref
	-	-	-	
	-	-	-	
	-	-	-	
Total	0	0	0	

¹ Where agreed savings are reasonably unable to be achieved other permanent savings are required to be identified and approved via quarterly monitoring.

² Temporary funding will only replace a slipped or unachieved saving for one year; the saving will still need to be made in future years (or be replaced with something else).

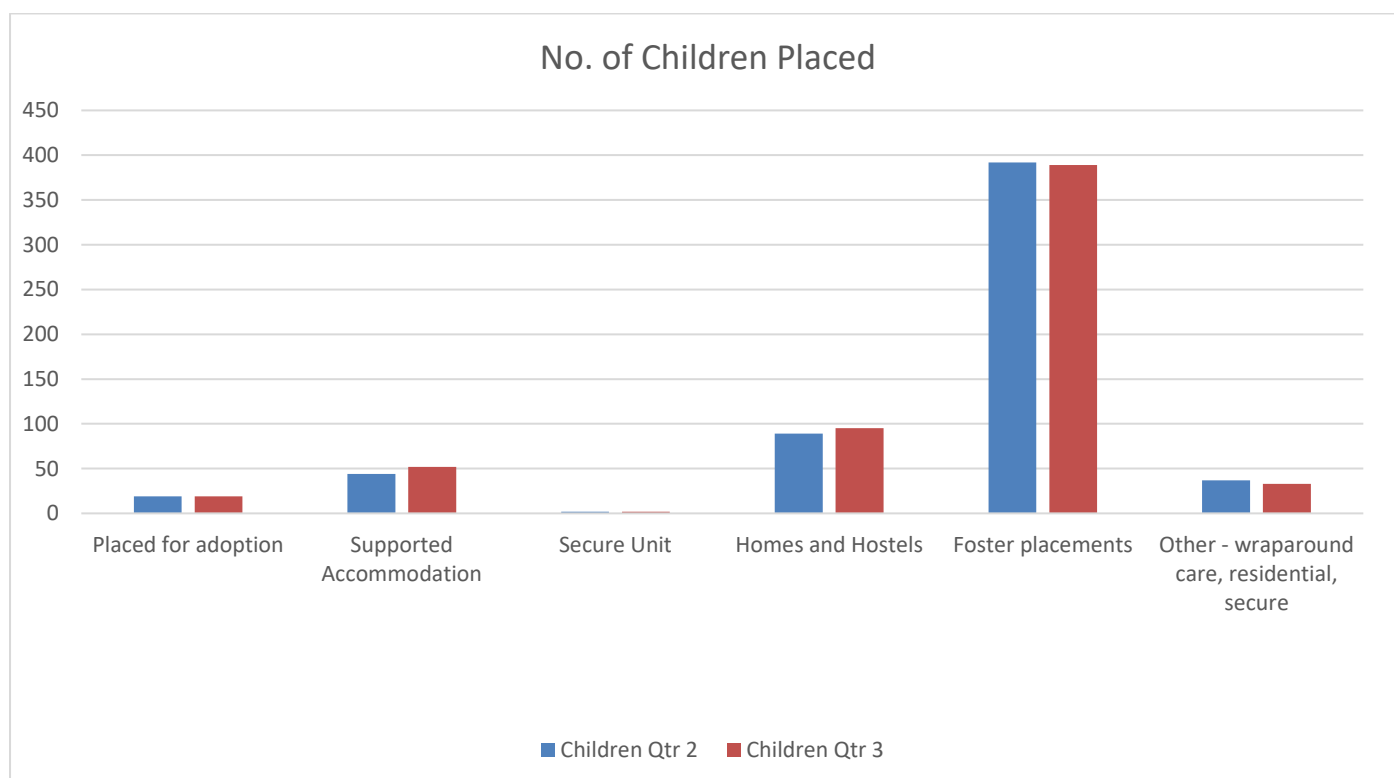
³ The slipped or unachieved saving will form part of the department's overall variance - it will either increase an overspend or decrease an underspend. The saving will still need to be made in future years (or be replaced with something else).

Revenue Budget 2023/24 (£'000)

Divisions	Planned Gross	Planned Income	Planned Net	Projected Gross	Projected Income	Projected Net	(Over)/ under spend Gross	(Over)/ under spend Income	(Over)/ under spend Net	Note ref
Central Resources	2,252	(1,332)	920	2,176	(1,332)	844	76	-	76	iv
Early Help and Social Care	100,583	(15,832)	84,751	128,912	(16,237)	112,675	(28,329)	405	(27,924)	v
Education and ISEND	111,792	(8,147)	103,645	113,249	(10,101)	103,148	(1,457)	1,954	497	vi
Communication, Planning and Performance	31,574	(4,340)	27,234	35,739	(7,380)	28,359	(4,165)	3,040	(1,125)	vii
DSG non Schools	-	(96,778)	(96,778)	-	(96,778)	(96,778)	-	-	-	
Schools	156,966	(156,966)	-	156,966	(156,966)	-	-	-	-	
Total CSD	403,167	(283,395)	119,772	437,042	(288,794)	148,248	(33,875)	5,399	(28,476)	viii

Capital programme 2023/24 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget Q3	Actual to date Q3	Projected 2023/24	Variation (Over) / under Q3 budget	Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend	Variation analysis: Slippage to future year	Variation analysis: Spend in advance	Note ref
House Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers	1,090	1,295	50	45	255	(205)	(205)	-	-	ix
Schools Delegated Capital	29,673	29,673	1,150	1,130	1,150	-	-	-	-	
Conquest Centre redevelopment	356	356	15	-	15	-	-	-	-	
Youth Investment Fund	193	193	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total CSD	31,312	31,517	1,215	1,175	1,420	(205)	(205)	0	0	x

Numbers of LAC per placement type (xi)

Cost of LAC per placement type (xii)

