

Children's Services – Q1 2024/25

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

Early Help and Social Care

HM Inspectorate of Probation (HMIP) inspection of Youth Justice Service delivered in East Sussex

HMIP undertook an inspection of our youth justice services week commencing 10 June 2024. The HMIP inspection report was published on 17 September. With an overall rating of Good, the report recognises the commitment and motivation of the partnership and youth justice service and the work they do to support children, young people and their parents and carers. The report highlights partnership working as a strength and rated nine of the 13 areas inspected 'good' or 'outstanding', including leadership of the service, the dedication and commitment of staff, and the range of high-quality services in place to personalise support. The quality of resettlement policy and provision is rated separately and was rated as requires improvement. The report picks up four areas for improvement, three for the service and one for the Police. An action plan has been developed to address these.

Valuing Care

We continue to embed Valuing Care, developed between May 2023 and January 2024, with support from IMPOWER. The work with IMPOWER focused on placement sufficiency and enhancing our ability to secure the right care for the right child for the right length of time. Valuing Care was developed as a process to help social workers to track the needs, strengths and outcomes of children in their care. The multi-agency Valuing Care panel meets bi-weekly. The panel develops high level plans and directs resources to improve outcomes for children and to reduce costs.

- To date, 54 children have been reviewed through the multi-agency panel. Nine children have been supported to move to a placement better suited to their strengths and profile of needs. A further 20 children have active plans on track to enable them to move to more appropriate placements that will support improved outcomes.
- Following the progress made at the Valuing Care panels, estimated savings totalling £2.3m have been identified between 2024/25 (£1.4m) and 2025/26 (£0.9m). In addition to this a further £1.5m of savings have been achieved (£0.3m in 2023/24 and £1.2m in 2024/25).

Enhancing our in house foster carer offer

One of our areas of focus is to enhance our inhouse foster carer offer. In February, the Council agreed an additional investment of £1.7m in our inhouse foster carers as part of the 2024/25 budget setting.

- In April 2024, the Council introduced a new payment structure and revision of maintenance payments to foster carers. This included a commitment for payments to keep pace in line with the National Minimum Allowance.
- In June 2024 we relaunched our fostering website.
- We are working with 19 other local authorities in the South East, as part of a Department for Education programme to launch a new regional fostering hub. The shared goal is to recruit and support more foster carers for our communities' children. The virtual hub will complement existing recruitment activity across the region from July 2024 onwards.
- Through the South East Fostering Regional Hub, we have secured funding to develop Mockingbird in 2024/25. The Mockingbird model brings foster carers together as part of 'satellite foster homes'. This includes a central hub home which provides resources and support to the satellite homes. This model has been effective in retaining foster carers and supporting them to provide care for children with more complex needs.

- As part of the Valuing Care approach, we have created a Valuing Care profile for each of our fostering households including an up to date skills review.

In 2023/24 the service saw 26 new Council foster homes (providing 38 new placements). The impact of the enhanced recruitment campaign and new foster carer rates has been seen in Q1:

- an increase of 47% in the number of enquiries compared to Q1 2023/24
- 8 new households were recruited providing 11 places in Q1

Regional Commissioning Co-operative

The Government's 'Stable Homes Built on Love' strategy for Children's Social Care, recognises the challenges of placement sufficiency and the dysfunctional market currently in place in England. The Department for Education is running two regional pathfinders to pilot Regional Commissioning Co-operatives. In Q1 the South East region was successful in bidding for one of the pathfinder projects. The region has been awarded a grant of £1.95m of revenue funding and up to £5m of capital funding for the 19 authorities in the region. The Council is part of the South East project and will play a key role in shaping future delivery of this key development in Children's Services.

Rate of Looked After Children (per 10,000 children) and children on a Child Protection plan

Q1 has seen an increase in the overall number of Looked After Children (LAC) (**ref i**) from 655 (61.5 per 10,000) on the last day of March 2024, to 684 (66.6 per 10,000) on the last day of June 2024. This is an overall increase of 29 children. Whilst there has been a continued focus on returning children to the care of their families during this period, there has been a significant increase in admissions to care during Q1. There were 67 children admitted to care and 38 children discharged from care. Of the children who became looked after:

- 11% were not open to Children's Services prior to needing to become looked after, their entry to care was unplanned for example due to bereavement, a significant parental mental ill health episode and unexplained injuries to children.
- 23% entered care with parental consent as a short-term legal measure to safeguard them at the same time that care proceedings were agreed. These children were quickly provided with an 'interim care order' legal status through the Family Court.
- A further 33% became looked after as a result of care proceedings, part of a planned process whereby parents had been supported through a pre proceedings however the necessary progress had not been achieved.
- 8% became looked after with parental consent as part a pre proceedings process.
- 5% became looked after via a Section 20 Children Act 1989 'Southwark Judgement' pathway, which obliges the local authority to support homeless 16–17-year-olds in need of accommodation and support.
- 8% became looked after via a Section 20 Children Act 1989 legal status following an unplanned admission pathway. The profile of these children includes neurodiversity and disability of the child or the caring adult.
- 11% were unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC) who were supported via the national transfer scheme that requires all local authorities to support UASC.

Of the above, 24% of cases had received, or are in receipt of, Connected Families support.

There has been a 6.7% reduction in children with a child protection plan between Q4 2023/24 and Q1 from 64.6 (688 children) per 10,000 to 62.5 (642 children).

Connected Families Service

We continue to see an impact from our Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP). The aim of the CFIP service is to:

- provide dedicated support for parents to address the barriers that impact on them safely and consistently caring for their children
- support families to stay together
- improve the wellbeing and life chances of children

The service provides access to specialist support at the start of a social care assessment and intervention process. From Q1 the CFIP service is working alongside Locality social workers in the three areas of focus: problematic parental drug and alcohol use; parental mental health issues, and parental domestic abuse. This allows the social workers to have a greater focus on the children and the impact of this harm on them, whilst CFIP work directly with the parents to reduce their harmful behaviour.

Feedback from families, social work teams and specialist services continues to be positive. In Q1:

- CFIP were delivering specialist interventions with 160 open Child in Need (CIN) and Child Protection (CP) cases
- 11 cases have stepped down from CP plan to CIN
- 2 cases have stepped down from the Public Law Outline (PLO) process, where the Council was considering care proceedings
- the estimated CFIP savings are £325,409 from stepping cases down and closing cases, with a forecast £1.5m saving by the end of the financial year

Since the launch of CFIP in January 2024 there has been a 14% reduction in children with a CP plan (from 744 in January to 643 in June). CFIP interventions have been the main contributory factor in this reduction. In addition, the average number of CIN case closures has increased, from 60 per month in early 2024 to 115 per month by May 2024 (91% increase), due to the progress families achieved through social work support and CFIP interventions. It is anticipated that this rate of closure will be maintained due to CFIP, although referrals into the service remain high.

Lansdowne Secure Children's Home

Following on from our successful reopening in February we have now recruited a full staff complement (for the initial 7 beds). We have been incrementally increasing the number of children as staff join the team. At the end of Q1 we had 4 children in Lansdowne, with plans to have 6 children resident by the end of August. We are now looking to increase capacity, particularly amongst support staff to enable us to amend our registration and open the remaining beds. Ensuring occupancy of at least 6 children is critical in terms of the home being financially sustainable.

Children are placed by other local authorities, as well as East Sussex (recognising that it is better for our own children to be placed locally if they need secure accommodation as this supports maintenance of family and support networks and aids transition back into the community). Due to the dynamic cost of placements, staffing and the profile of children's needs, the charging policy at Lansdowne is subject to regular review and change and a wider scale review is planned as part of the Council's budget setting process.

The education provision within the secure unit is operating well and delivering a creative, comprehensive curriculum. Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust, commissioned to provide health services at Lansdowne, has experienced delays in recruitment which has had some impact on which children we have been able to place in Lansdowne. The Trust has recently recruited to critical roles which will support us to meet the needs of a more diverse group from September.

Care leavers celebration event

In May we held our Care Leavers Celebration Event at De La Warr Pavilion, Bexhill on Sea. The evening celebrated our wonderful, hardworking young people. The event included:

- showcasing the young people's talents, for example, artwork, music, baking and clothing designs
- celebrating young people finishing university and young people moving into employment

The event also provided an opportunity to see the enduring relationships that our young people have with members of the Care Leavers Team and the difference those relationships make.

Supporting Families Programme

The Supporting Families transformation programme is a key part of the drive to develop a joined-up whole family, whole system approach to Early Intervention. For over 10 years, the programme has worked to develop the Early Intervention system and has proven that a whole family approach successfully improves outcomes for families with multiple needs and prevents high-cost statutory intervention.

Prevention of the need for statutory intervention by the children's social care system has been a long-standing objective of the Supporting Families programme, and an important part of care system transformation. Locally the Early Intervention Partnership Board leads this work and it is reflected in our Early Intervention Strategy.

The number of families we are working with continues to increase as we broaden the programme. There has been an increase in teams working as part of the programme over the last 12 months.

In Q1:

- 560 families received a family support intervention
- there were 184 successful payment by results claims

Education

Excellence for All 2024-30

Our ambitious, new 2024-30 'Excellence for All' vision will launch in September 2024. It will represent a shared vision for education in East Sussex, with shared responsibility for improving the outcomes of our children and young people.

In May, as part of the engagement process, we held a successful consultation meeting with education representatives from Early Years through to Post 16. This provided us with detailed feedback on the key themes, which we have embedded into the vision.

The vision will set out our shared ambition for an excellent, inclusive, and equitable education system in East Sussex by 2030. Our schools, colleges and settings will foster a strong sense of belonging for all children and young people.

Delivering our vision across East Sussex

Our Excellence for All vision will be delivered through our partnerships with schools, colleges, and settings. In Q1, we met with school leaders across primary and secondary to talk about excellence and inclusion, as well as agreeing priorities for the year ahead. The primary and secondary boards will work through their locality groups to deliver our shared ambitions for children and young people's learning.

Underpinning this work, is a series of key, countywide strategies that we have developed with our school leaders. This includes:

- Small schools strategy: a shared approach to develop strong partnerships across schools in hard federations and multi-academy trusts so that we can ensure that small schools are sustainable and remain at the heart of their communities.
- Flexi-schooling policy: setting out a clear framework for headteachers to ensure that children attend school full-time.

- Attendance delivery plan: clarifying responsibilities across services and schools so that we are working together effectively to increase attendance and deliver our new, statutory duties from September.
- Alternative Provision strategy: developing our offer so that we are making a broader range of provision that can meet the needs of pupils who are unable to access full-time mainstream education. We have agreed an Alternative Provision Sub-Group to oversee this work; it will begin in September and report to the Joint Board and the Special Educational needs and Disabilities (SEND) Governance Board.
- Statement of Intent: setting out clear aspirations and activities for schools and the Council, working in partnership to improve the experience of pupils with SEND, and their families transitioning between primary and secondary schools.

SEND Governance Board

Our SEND Governance Board has been reviewing the way it works and its priorities for the new academic year during Q1. This includes:

- Redesigning the Terms of Reference in line with the recommendations within the SEND and Alternative Provision Change Programme. This includes broadening membership to provide a more comprehensive representation of all stakeholders across the SEND landscape.
- Developing a Local Area Inclusion Plan which draws together detailed information in relation to the SEND population in East Sussex and views of stakeholders on where there are gaps in existing provision.
- Improving parent/carer involvement and further enhancing co-production.

The education division has also been reviewing its services and operational priorities for the new academic year, to ensure that they remain relevant and effective.

Revenue Budget Summary

The department has a total net budget of £144.893m in 2024-25, and the Q1 forecast spend is £157.375m. This is an overspend of £12.482m (**ref viii**).

The main area of projected overspend is within Early Help and Social Care, but due to additional investment in the Looked After Children budget this year, the Council is not anticipating the level of overspend we had last year.

The biggest service pressure the Council has now is within Home to School Transport.

Central Resources overspend of £0.078m (ref ii)

Central Resources has a budget of £1.045m and forecast expenditure of £1.123m. This pressure is partially offset by £0.022m reduction in staffing within the Personal Assistant function.

There is also a planned drawdown from the Academisation reserve of £0.1m this year to offset departmental pressures.

Early Help and Social Care overspend of £7.384m (ref iii)

Early Help and Social Care has a budget of £107.42m and forecast expenditure of £114.804m.

The budget was increased by £23.857m this year, across LAC placements, foster carers, staffing and commissioning. £3.972m of its Early Help service budget is funded by the Public Health grant.

There is £0.084m overspend within the Management team due to staffing and the purchase of safety devices for staff.

There is a £0.193m forecast overspend within the Asylum Seekers service. There was a change in legislation effective from March 2023 which means that when children turn 18, they have no recourse to public funds, and they are solely dependent on the Council. The Council currently has 29 children turning 18 this financial year, which creates this £0.193m pressure.

The Social Work and Education service currently forecasts a £0.184m staffing overspend within their Recruitment and Connected Practice teams.

Youth Justice forecasts a £0.124m overspend due to staffing pressures within the Youth Offending Team, Secure Remand, and MACE Keywork teams.

The Looked After Children service has a forecast £3.746m overspend:

- £0.665m of this is within the 18+ Care Leavers budget
- £1.394m pressure is due to spend on agency placements. Contributing to this overspend are 3 children costing above £25k per week and 7 children costing above £15k per week. Assumptions have been calculated for growth and churn within the placements, and the service will be receiving £1.758m COVID funding and £0.4m Supported Accommodation Reform grant funding as mitigation
- there is £0.836m forecast overspend within the Children's Homes, if we recruit to currently vacant posts
- additional pressures within Fostering Services, Respite Units, and LAC Management are offset by a small forecast underspend within Adoption Services

The Localities service forecasts an overspend of £2.702m:

- £1.786m of this is on staffing, including 21 newly qualified social workers starting in September. All agency social workers contracts will end in September. There are no plans to recruit further social workers in locality at this stage.
- there is an additional £0.54m pressure within placements for SEND children and Intentionally Homeless

Finally, there is £0.351m overspend within the Specialist Services. This includes £0.204m within Foundations, £0.13m on Under 25 Substance Misuse, and £0.281m on other teams. All pressures are on staffing. £0.264m mitigation is due to underspending on staffing within the Management & Support team.

Education overspend of £0.186m (ref iv)

Education has a budget of £9.72m and forecast expenditure of £9.906m.

There is forecast overspend of £0.186m within the SEND service. £0.075m is on staffing for Elective Home Education posts and £0.111m is on the required use of agency staffing for the Educational Psychology team.

Communication, Planning and Performance (including Home to School Transport) overspend of £4.834m (ref v)

Communication, Planning and Performance has a budget of £28.323m and forecast expenditure of £33.157m.

£0.055m overspend is due to under-achievement of income within Outdoor Education, where poor weather has meant a fall in demand for services and memberships.

£0.037m underspend is due to management of vacancies and non-essential expenditure within Planning & Performance Improvement, Safeguarding, and Organisational Development.

Home to School Transport has a forecast overspend of £4.816m. This service did receive £0.379m growth in their budget this year for inflationary pressures, but growth in numbers of pupils and unit costs for transport have far outstripped what was agreed.

SEN client numbers have increased by 22% above 2023/24 levels and SEN clients who travel solo have increased by 14%. Unit and contract costs for the transport itself has also increased by a further 3.5% from 2023/24.

Proposals for cost avoidance are being developed by CET and CSD. These proposals will look at ways to reduce the number of solo taxis and review the personal transport budget (PTB) strategy with the aim of increasing the number of more cost effective PTBs being taken up by families. Other areas being explored include; route optimisation (increase average occupancy rates in taxis); double running, and exploring alternative transport options such as group pick up points and public transport; integrating transport needs assessment into annual education, health and care plan reviews to ensure appropriate type of transport assistance; reviewing the commissioning policy and practice, to better understand current pressures and future needs; supplier management and independent travel training.

Capital Programme Summary (ref xi)

CSD has a capital budget in 2024/25 of £1.936m and forecast expenditure of £2.085m. This is an overspend of £0.149m.

£0.29m overspend is forecast on the Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers' Homes project (**ref ix**). A backlog of adaptations have been agreed and will require funding this year. However, adaptations are likely to slip throughout the year as obtaining legal charges against properties can delay works.

£0.141m underspend is forecast within the Essential System Development Projects (**ref x**). This is due to timing of recruitment of staff to work on the project.

Performance exceptions (See How to read this report for definition)

Priority – Driving sustainable economic growth

Performance measure	Outturn 23/24	Target 24/25	RAG Q1 24/25	RAG Q2 24/25	RAG Q3 24/25	RAG Q4 24/25	Q1 24/25 outturn	Note ref
Rate of Looked After Children (per 10,000 children)	61.5 (655 children)	61.8 (635 children)	A				66.6 (684 children)	i

Savings exceptions 2024/25 (£'000)

Service description	Original Target For 2024/25	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 2024/25 (£'000)

Divisions	Planned Gross	Planned Income	Planned Net	2024/25 Gross	2024/25 Income	2024/25 Net	(Over)/ under spend Gross	(Over)/ under spend Income	(Over)/ under spend Net	Note ref
Central Resources	2,367	(1,322)	1,045	2,410	(1,287)	1,123	(43)	(35)	(78)	ii
Early Help and Social Care	123,213	(15,793)	107,420	133,470	(18,666)	114,804	(10,257)	2,873	(7,384)	iii
Education	132,662	(7,059)	125,603	133,632	(7,843)	125,789	(970)	784	(186)	iv
Communication, Planning and Performance	32,519	(4,196)	28,323	39,328	(6,171)	33,157	(6,809)	1,975	(4,834)	v
Schools	154,701	(154,701)	-	154,701	(154,701)	-	-	-	-	vi
DSG Non Schools	-	(117,498)	(117,498)	-	(117,498)	(117,498)	-	-	-	vii
Total CSD	445,462	(300,569)	144,893	463,541	(306,166)	157,375	(18,079)	5,597	(12,482)	viii

Capital programme 2024/25 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget Q1	Actual to date Q1	Projected 2024/25	Variation (Over) / under Q1 budget	Variation analysis: (Over) / under spend	Variation analysis: Slippage to future year	Variation analysis: Spend in advance	Note ref
Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers' Homes	1,090	1,443	50	-	340	(290)	(290)	-	-	ix
Schools Delegated Capital	29,673	29,673	1,150	(26)	1,150	-	-	-	-	
Children's Services Essential System Developments	736	736	736	33	595	141	-	141	-	x
Total CSD	31,499	31,852	1,936	7	2,085	(149)	(290)	141	0	xi