

Children's Services – end of year 2024/25

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

Early Help and Social Care

Family and Youth Hubs

Our Family and Youth Hubs are now well established as delivery points for a range of Early Help services. This includes:

- **Health visiting** - April 2024 to Mar 2025
 - New Birth Visits - 98.23% completed of the 4,170 that were due a visit.
 - 6–8-week Visits - 96.74% completed of the 4,204 that were due a visit.
 - 1-year Visits - 95.11% completed of the 4,516 that were due a visit.
 - 2½ Year Visits - 92.33% completed of the 4,708 that were due a visit. More parents choose to decline this visit due to children attending nursery or parents working.
- **Infant feeding**
 - In Q4, 1338 calls were made to 950 Parents were called to offer feeding advice/support at 10 days after birth.
 - 757 calls were successful, and 192 parents were referred to feeding support and/or were referred to midwifery.
 - Our breast-feeding rates for Q4 were 59.2% above the national average of 53% (at Q3, latest data available) so we are confident that this intervention (which began with a pilot in Q2 2023/24) is making a difference.
- **Language and communication support**
 - Of 673 children identified as not achieving the expected milestones in language skills in Q4 2023/24, 96.39% either showed an improvement in language skills or were referred for specialist therapy by Q4 2024/25.
- **Family keywork**
 - During Q4, Early Help keyworkers delivered intensive support to 1023 families (2,142 children).
 - 188 Early Help keywork plans ended in Q4, 155 with the outcomes achieved. Only 16% stepped up to social care.
 - During Q4, 92.5% agreed that things have changed for the better as a result of getting targeted support from the 0-19 Early Help Service.
- **Parenting support**

We have had a focus on perinatal mental health support and improving the parent infant relationship.

- In 2024/25, 401 sessions of perinatal counselling were held, with 91% parents showing an improvement in their mental health
 - 100% of those completing a Time for Me (post-natal support group for mild-moderate anxiety) intervention showed a positive outcome in Q4.
 - 100% parents reported a better awareness of their response to their infant after engagement with BrightPip (parent infant psychotherapy).
- **Youth Hubs**
- Funding from the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) via the Youth Investment Fund has allowed us to upgrade two outdated Youth Hubs in 2024/25. Both Hubs are set to reopen their doors this summer once work is fully completed.
- Heathfield Youth Hub is nearing completion. It is a new purpose built rural Youth Hub offering young people from Heathfield and the surrounding area access to a range of positive activities and youth support services.

- The JOFF Youth Hub in Peacehaven is undergoing a significant refurbishment and extension doubling the existing footprint. The newly improved Youth Hub will provide a much-needed broad range of positive activities and youth support services for young people from the Havens.

Capital funding was secured through the government's Levelling Up programme for a major refurbishment of Hollington Youth Hub in Hastings. This includes extending its facilities to meet the demands of local children and young people. The Hub closed at Easter 2025 – and is due to reopen in March 2026.

Young people have been involved at all stages of these three developments. They have identified the types of activities and support they would like to see delivered from the new buildings, and played a role in helping design the interiors of the buildings.

Homes

At Q4, our 4 open Children's Residential Homes are all judged Good and are operating at full capacity. We have reduced staff vacancies and enhanced management oversight. This has resulted in reduced levels of agency use in the homes.

Lansdowne Secure Children's Home has received a second Good judgement since reopening and has evidenced financial sustainability (with a £0.605m underspend in 2024/25). As part of our year 2 plan, we are working towards submitting a Variation of Approval to Ofsted. This will allow us to increase capacity to 10-12 children (we are currently registered for 7).

Our two further residential homes for children with disabilities have experienced significant challenges over 2024/25. They are currently rated as Requires Improvement. We have a robust action plan in place and recent visits from Ofsted have confirmed the positive trajectory of both homes. Recruitment across residential services remains a national challenge. We are working with the Department for Education (DfE) National Support programme and the South East Regional Care Cooperative to actively address this need.

Transformation

We have set up a governance structure for the transformation programme established in response to the government's Families First Partnership programme and the children's social care reforms included in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill. The Transformation Board is chaired by the Director of Children's Services. We have established multi-agency workstreams which meet monthly and report to the Board. The workstreams are beginning work on:

- Earlier intervention – supporting partners to hold more lower level risk with support from Team Around the Family Co-ordinators and a professional help line. Work is underway to launch in September 2025.
- Family Help – the integration of early help keywork and social work teams in line with the DfE Families First Partnership guidance. A pilot is planned for late 2025/early 2026 with full implementation of the new model planned for autumn 2026.
- Multi-Agency Child Protection Teams – these will support child protection statutory duties. They will include social work, education, police and health. We plan to pilot our approach in East Sussex in autumn 2026 and launch as set out in the Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill in 2027.
- Family Network and Kinship care – consolidating the family group conference offer and developing plans to upskill the workforce and partners to facilitate family network meetings. These will support families to support children in their family network.

Child in Need (CIN) cases and Child Protection Plans (CPP)

The Council's Family and Youth Support Teams (FYSTs) continue to focus on addressing specific parental risk factors around mental health, substance issue and domestic abuse. These factors underpin a significant number of CPP cases. The FYSTs continue to work towards these cases stepping down to a CIN status. In addition, they retain a focus on safely closing as many CIN

cases as possible and improving knowledge and awareness of Early Help services to ensure families are supported as part of the step down from statutory social care services.

- The number of CIN (not including Children's Disability Service (CDS) CIN) reduced slightly from 955 at end of Q3 to 953 at the end of Q4. This is a 10% reduction on the Q4 2023/24 figure of 1,060. CDS CIN numbers reduced slightly over the course of 2024/25 from 151 to 137 (9% decrease). This has been achieved in CDS despite the continued change in the work process where children's cases are now not transferred to Adult Social Care until they reach their eighteenth birthday (cases previously transferred at age 16).
- Over the course of 2024/25 there were four months when the number of CIN plans (non-CDS cases) increased from the total the previous month and on 8 other cases the numbers reduced. This reflects the inter-relationship between CIN numbers and CPP numbers as well as the impact on how many children are brought into FYST via the Duty and Assessment Team (DAT) Family Assessment work each month. This is also dependent on other variables such as CIN closure numbers and new numbers of children being transferred from the DAT. CIN closures continue to be a priority for all FYST's and a target remains for the 150 CIN closures to take place each month across the 10 FYST's.
- We reduced the overall number of children countywide subject to CIN plans from 315 at the end of March 2024 to 256 at the end of March 2025. A specific target during 2024/25 was to reduce the proportion of open CIN cases open for 9 months or more from 29% at the end of March 2024 to 15% at the end of March 2025. Despite reducing this figure to 21% by the end of October 2024 this has subsequently increased to 27% by the end of March 2025. This remains a particular issue in East FYST teams where 35% of our CIN children have been open for 9 months or more, compared with only 21% in the West FYST teams. This may reflect greater levels of deprivation across the East of the county. We remain committed to reducing this to 15% across the county in 2025/26.
- In Q4, the re-referral rate increased slightly, from 16% to 17%. Whilst this is still relatively low this will be carefully monitored to identify and address any emerging themes. In four of the last five months the re-referral rate has exceeded the existing target, and this may reflect the greater numbers of CIN cases being closed each month.
- At the end of Q4, there were 614 children (59.8 per 10,000) subject to a CPP. This is a 5% reduction from the 645 recorded at Q3 and an 11% reduction from the 691 recorded at Q4 2023/24. This means we have met our target of below 661 children (63.4 per 10,000). Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP) support continues to be instrumental in reducing demand at these highest levels of concern.
- At the end of Q4 we had 73 children subject to a CPP for 18 months or more. This is an 8% reduction from Q3 (80 children) but the proportion of children in this category remains over the 10% target at 12%. This remains a priority area for development for 2025/26.

Connected Families Intervention Practitioners (CFIP)

CFIP, introduced in January 2024, deliver intervention for parents experiencing difficulties. They tackle the main causes of family breakdown, delivering rapid and proactive support and evidence based interventions. The teams include practitioners who specialise in working with the adults in the family on the key areas of domestic abuse, mental health and substance misuse. In 2024/25 the service worked with 539 families with children on CPP or CIN plans.

- CFIPs work with families has been instrumental in enabling and sustaining change and reducing risks.
- 77% of the families achieved the aim of the intervention through completing assessments, programmes, bespoke support, and accessing tailored advice and guidance. 17% disengaged and did not complete the intervention. The needs of only 6% of families escalated during/post CFIP interventions.

Improvements in Public Law Outline (PLO) timeliness

As part of Children's Services post inspection improvement plan the revision and expansion of the PLO Tracker and reporting measures has allowed the service to more comprehensively track all of our cases, understand their outcomes and timeliness and the rationale for any delay. This has helped to drive the improvements we have seen during 2024/25 alongside the practice changes we have introduced. The average length of PLO at end of Q4, was 16.9 weeks (compared to 24 weeks at Q1). 10% of cases were over 26 weeks (compared to 20% at the time of Ofsted inspection). Through effective use of the PLO period during 2024/25 39% of children were successfully diverted from care proceedings and enabled to continue to live within their families.

Family Group Conferences (FGCs) and Kinship care

The Children's Wellbeing and Schools Bill recommends making FGCs a statutory requirement prior to care proceedings, embedding them as a mandatory first step in decision-making when children are at risk of entering care. This approach reflects a broader national shift towards family-led solutions and kinship-based care. The Council's FGC service has been operational for over 20 years and is accredited by the Family Rights Group. The service is nationally recognised for its quality and impact. It has a specialist team delivering trauma-informed and restorative interventions. As part of Children's Services transformation programme planning is underway to deliver earlier support to families using this approach. In 2024/25, 92% of families were referred to the FGC service prior to the first Meeting Before Proceedings meeting.

In December 2023, the DfE published Championing Kinship Care, the first national kinship care strategy, setting out clear guidance for local authorities. East Sussex is among 11 local authorities working in partnership with Foundations to implement the Kinship Care Practice Guide. The Guide promotes evidence-based support for kinship carers. East Sussex was invited to present on its work in a national feedback panel, reflecting external recognition of the Council's strategic leadership in this area.

- In Q4 9.5% of Looked After Children were placed with kinship carers
- We are currently providing financial support to 484 children subject to Special Guardianship Orders (SGOs).

Enhanced in-house foster care offer

To improve placement sufficiency, enable more children to have access to our high-quality foster carers and achieve value for money we have focused on enhancing our in house foster carer offer. As a result of our improved recruitment campaign in 2024/25 we have recruited 30 new households, which equates to 47 places. During the same period, 13 households retired from being foster carers (22 places). Our net gain for 2024/25 is 17 households which equates to 25 places.

Rate of Looked After Children (LAC) (per 10,000 children)

At the end of Q4 there were 691 LAC (67.3 per 10,000) a small decrease from 698 at the end of Q3. This is above the target of 61.8 (635 children).

During Q4, 39 children were admitted into local authority care via our DAT and FYST teams (Locality Children's Social Care). One child was admitted via the Child Exploitation Team (part of Youth Justice Service). 9 of those children had ceased to be LAC by the end Q4. This compares with 53 who became looked after under the same pathway in Q3. 49% of these children became looked after via a Section 20 Children Act 1989 arrangement, with 33% entering care through care proceedings (Section 38 Children Act 1989 Interim Care orders) and 18% initially via Police Protection. All LAC admissions continue to be authorised at Assistant Director level.

A summary of those entering care is provided below:

- 15% were provided with LAC status following or alongside a Meeting Before Action (MBA) process. This process is used when we believe that the risks to a child are so great that it might be necessary to ask the court to decide where the child will live and who they should live with

through a court order. These children were placed with either their wider family or foster care. All children subject to this legal status are reviewed each month with a RAG rating provided based on the likelihood of them returning to parental care or to that of a wider family member.

- 18% entered care via an unplanned crisis led pathway, via Police Protection (Section 46 Children Act 1989). 5 of those 7 children had returned home by the end of Q4.
- 3% re-entered local authority care via an adoption disruption.
- 5% entered local authority care as a result of a special guardianship order disruption.
- 13% entered local authority care due to being considered beyond parental control. 3% of these children had also experienced an adoption disruption. These children are predominately adolescents with a complexity of needs including emotional wellbeing and mental health concerns, neurodiversity, special educational needs, and behaviours that challenge. An additional factor is the challenge around identifying appropriate education provision to meet these children's needs. Placement and support costs for these children are often the most significant.
- 8% entered local authority care via the Southwark Judgement Homeless pathway which requires the local authority to support homeless 16–17-year-olds in need of accommodation and support.
- 5 of the 13 children who became LAC via an Interim Care order (Section 38 Children Act 1989) did so following completion of an MBA process.
- 4 of the children became subject to an Interim Care order via private law proceedings where the primary issue of concern was parental alienation. All 4 of these interim care orders had been discharged by the end of Q4.
- There has been a continued reduction in the number of families subject to MBA during 2024/25 compared to our last inspecting local authority children's services (ILAC) Inspection in December 2023. At the time of that ILAC inspection there were 47 families subject to the MBA process. At the end of Q4 there were 30 families subject to the same process with 84% within the statutory timescale of 16 weeks. This demonstrates the continued improved oversight, timeliness and rigour of response to children within pre-proceedings. Parental mental health, domestic abuse and substance misuse continue to be the predominant concerns with regards to children who were made subject to an Interim Care order (Section 38 Children Act 1989) in Q4 alongside 3 children who had been suspected of suffering non accidental physical injury. The investment in CFIP (who specialise in interventions in these 3 areas) continues to be critical in achieving positive change and enabling more children to live safely within their families.

38% of the 39 children admitted into care in Q4 were placed in foster care and 20.5% were placed with kinship carers. 10% required a Residential Children's Home provision. 18% were Placed with Parents (this is a high figure this quarter but includes 4 children being made subject to an interim care order (ICO) through private law proceedings). 8% of the children required post 16 supported accommodation and 5% were placed in an assessment foster care placement with their mother (now ended during Q4).

In addition, 12 separated migrant children arrived and came into our care in Q4. All these children are looked after under Section 20 of the Children's Act. The majority have been placed into post-16 supported accommodation, with two placed with foster carers.

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

HMIP undertook an inspection of our youth justice services in the week commencing 10 June 2024 and published the inspection report on 17 September 2024. 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. 9 of the 13 areas inspected are rated 'Good' or 'Outstanding'. We are delivering our action plan to address the areas for improvement.

Education

Recruitment of childminders

In March 2025, we launched our '[Do something big](#)' campaign to recruit more childminders in East Sussex. The campaign is part of our work on the sufficiency of Early Years places, and preparation for the expansion of Early Years places.

The government currently funds 15 hours per week childcare for children aged nine months and above. In September 2025 this will increase to 30 hours. We expect demand for childminders to rise, especially for wraparound care for primary school children. The Council is offering a £600 grant to encourage childminders to deliver care before and after school. This is being used to help attract new people to the sector.

Improving attendance across East Sussex

In January 2025, 140 school leaders attended the 'The Power of Connection: Responding Together for Success' event. Attendees included headteachers, principals, and attendance leads. The purpose of the event was to collaborate on improving attendance across our schools and settings.

One of our Young Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Ambassadors opened the event. They highlighted the importance of breaking down barriers faced by young people around attendance. Attendees also celebrated and shared best practice from local primary and secondary schools. This included:

- strategies to improve attendance and a sense of belonging
- the impact of current work with young people and families across East Sussex in breaking down barriers around attendance

Attendance remains a key priority for Children's Services. We are committed to fostering continued cooperation with school leaders and multi-agency partners to ensure our collective efforts on attendance are effective and have impact.

Although challenges remain, we are beginning to see some positive developments which, if they continue, will be reflected in the attendance data for the 2024/25 academic year, which will be reported in 2025/26. This includes the persistent absence rates for all pupils, including those with Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs) and receiving Special Educational Needs (SEN) support, which is currently lower than at the same time last year.

East Sussex Area SEND Inspection and SEND Improvement Plan

We continue to work with our partners across the East Sussex SEND community to deliver the East Sussex SEND Strategy 2022/25. In November 2024 we had our Area SEND Inspection of the East Sussex Local Partnership. Ofsted published their report in February 2025. The local area received the middle outcome: *The local area partnership's arrangements lead to inconsistent experiences and outcomes for children and young people with special educational needs and/or disabilities (SEND)*. The local area partnership will work together to make the improvements. The Partnership has updated the East Sussex SEND Strategy with the Inspection Implementation Plan. We have also agreed to extend our current SEND Strategy 2022/25 until September 2026. The SEND Strategy Governance Board will oversee the implementation of this plan.

It is important to note that this round of Local Area SEND inspections comes at a time of significant challenge for local authorities, the vast majority of whom are struggling to implement the full breadth of the 2014 reforms due to increasing demand and insufficient resources. Key challenges include:

- There have been significant increases in the number of requests for EHCP assessments (1,164 requests in 2024/25, compared to 553 in 2020/21) and in EHCPs that are issued (540 new plans issued in 2024/25, compared to 318 in 2020/21).

- The tribunal system does not have to take account of the resource implications for local authorities which can compound issues due to expectations of the families of children with SEND.
- The funding of SEND does not take into account levels of demand and relies on an out-dated formula. This means that there is significant disparity across the country in terms of how different local authorities are funded.

Improving Alternative Provision in East Sussex

In 2024/25, we reviewed our Alternative Provision (AP) offer. The offer supports pupils unable to access mainstream education due to exclusion, illness, or other challenges. We have established an Alternative Provision Subgroup, consisting of relevant partners, including school leaders. The subgroup reports to the Joint Board and SEND Strategy Governance Board. Key responsibilities of the group include:

- ongoing review of the AP offer
- overseeing the planned transfer of our Pupil Referral Unit provision to a new academy trust by September 2025.

Partnership for Inclusion of Neurodiversity in Schools (PINS) project

Throughout 2024/25 the Council has been taking part in the national PINS project. This was a joint NHS and DfE programme that aimed to support the education and health needs of neurodiverse children in mainstream primary schools. The project was designed to be time limited and ended in March 2025. It focused on a partnership approach, and we worked closely with the East Sussex Parent Carer Forum. From September 2024 to March 2025, 16 East Sussex schools took part. Both national and local evaluations, including testimonials and case studies, are underway to better understand the impact of the project. Positive feedback locally from parents, young people, and school throughout the delivery phase helped to shape the project in East Sussex.

We will continue working closely with the participating schools to assess how the learning from the project is being embedded and to help determine future support needs.

The percentage of eligible 2-year-olds who take up a place with an eligible early years provider

The percentage of eligible disadvantaged children aged 2 years old (**ref i**) who took up a funded place in the spring 2025 funding period was 73.5% (808 out of a DfE list of 1,100 families who could potentially be eligible). This is below the national average of 74.8%.

This is a reduction from 80% at Q3. However, this reduction is due to differences in how children are being reported. Some of the children who are eligible to access a funded place as a disadvantaged 2-year-old are also eligible to take up a funded place under the working families funding streams implemented from April 2024. This is reflected in the lower number of children being identified as a disadvantaged 2-year-old.

The difference in how future reporting of the percentage of children eligible for both funding streams was not flagged in Q3 as the external IT provider and the DfE were expected to provide a work around for local authorities. We expect to be able to identify the number of disadvantaged 2-year-olds who are also eligible for the working families funding stream, approximately 18% of total cohort, for Q1 2025/26.

Average attainment 8 score

- The average attainment 8 score for state funded pupils (**ref ii**) for academic year 2023/24 is 43.1 (revised results published by the DfE on 27 Feb 2025). This is below the national figure of 46.1 and below our target was 44.
- The average attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils (**ref iv**) for academic year 2023/24 is 30.1 (revised results published by the DfE on 27 Feb 2025). This is below the national figure of 34.7 and below our target of 30.5.

- Final, validated data for LAC attainment 8 score academic year 2023/24 (**ref iii**) is expected to be published in June 2025. The provisional outturn is 14.7 which is below the target of 19.0.

Further improvement in attainment is needed in Hastings and Bexhill. The performance of four academies in the area impacts significantly on the overall outturn for East Sussex. The young people attending those schools account for approximately one fifth of all secondary pupils in year 11. Actions we are taking to improve secondary school attainment for academic year 2024/25 include:

- Targeting school improvement resources through the Secondary Board. This includes using our external adviser programme to deliver bespoke support as needed.
- Focusing on improving outcomes for disadvantaged pupils. We are embedding a programme of 'Study Visits' to provide Continuing Professional Development for Headteachers and Senior Leaders.
- Attendance is a critical factor when considering attainment and progress outcomes for all key stages and pupil groups. We continue to support all secondary schools to implement 'Working together to improve school attendance' which became statutory in August 2024.
- For LAC, we continue to offer tutoring in English and Maths to all our cohort but with a focus on year 10 and 11 students. Personal Education plans cover the importance of revision and young people and carers are given revision advice. We are dedicated in our support for our Year 11 students, providing intensive assistance to remove obstacles that could impact their exam success. Many of our Year 11 cohort have experienced challenging circumstances which will impact on their performance.

The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 16 (year 12) and academic age 17 (year 13) including unknowns

- The percentage of young people who are NEET at academic age 16 (**ref v**) for 2024/25 is 4.2% against a target of less than or equal to 5%. This is within target and an improvement on last year's annual figure of 4.4%.
- The percentage of young people who are NEET at academic age 17 (**ref vi**) for 2024/25 is 5.7% against a target of less than or equal to 7%. This is within target and an improvement on last year's annual figure of 6%.

The commissioned advice and support that our Youth Employability Service (YES) provides has had a positive impact in supporting young people to access education, employment, and training. We continue to work with the DfE and local colleges to expand the courses available at Level 2 and below. Level 2 courses are generally equivalent to GCSEs and can serve as a pathway to Level 3 courses, apprenticeships, or employment.

The proportion of academic age 16-17 years whose Education, Employment and Training (EET) situation is not known is 0.9%. This is less than the national figure of 2.2%.

Communications Planning and Performance

Climate Change Event for Education Settings

In March 2025, we held our East Sussex Climate Change online event for Education Settings. The event was attended by participants from 40 education settings across East Sussex. It provided a platform for them to showcase their ongoing initiatives related to climate change. The event included an update on the DfE's Sustainability Strategy and the East Sussex Climate Change Charter. One of the highlights of the event was an inspiring talk by Fergus Garrett, Head Gardener at Great Dixter. He spoke about the potential of gardening in schools to enhance biodiversity. Attendees had the opportunity to engage in a lively question and answer session with our expert panel. The event highlighted the dedication and creativity of our education settings in addressing climate change.

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme

The HAF programme continued in 2024/25. We worked with around 86 providers who offered over 38,600 sessions over the course of the year. Feedback showed that many parents felt HAF had benefitted their child's wellbeing and confidence and, in turn, had had a positive impact on the mental health of some parents and families.

Partnership working

We have worked with NHS and other partners to:

- develop information, advice and guidance for CYP mental health and emotional wellbeing
- update the council wide Equality Strategy to include support to schools
- establish the Care Experience Partnership Group
- re-sign the Armed Forces Covenant

Revenue Budget Summary

The department has a total net budget of £146.985m in 2024/25, and the Q4 outturn was £160.632m. This is a year-end overspend of £13.647m (**ref xi**).

The main area of overspend is within Early Help and Social Care, but due to additional investment in the LAC budget this year, the Council did not overspend to the same extent as 2023/24.

The second largest service pressure Children's Services have is within Home to School Transport.

Not included in the figures reported above is the position of the Dedicated Schools Grant, which, in accordance with the Schools and Early Years Finance (England) Regulations 2020, is required by local authorities to be carried forward on their balance sheets. As of 31st March 2025, the East Sussex has a cumulative Dedicated Schools Grant surplus of £2.837m, which is very unusual, as most local authorities have significant DSG deficits. However, this will not continue as a forecast cumulative deficit is expected by the end of 2025/26. The statutory override is due to expire in March 2026, which means that any deficit will then be offset against useable council reserves.

Central Resources underspend of £1.440m (ref vii)

Central Resources has a budget of £1.063m and outturn overspend of £0.377m. The position worsened by £0.035m in Q4 due to small movements in staffing and legal costs.

Early Help and Social Care overspend of £12.392m (ref viii)

Early Help and Social Care has a budget of £109.145m and outturn expenditure of £121.537m. The position improved by £0.721m in Q4.

The position for Separated Children (formerly called Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking Children) worsened by £0.058m, taking it to a £0.494m overspend. Since Q3, the Home Office grant return for April-September 2024 has been completed and returned, so the income is now more definite. However, the income for October-March had to be estimated and accrued, as the Home Office don't confirm funding until the next financial year.

The Looked After Children (LAC) service had a £9.087m overspend. This improved by £0.330m in Q4:

- There was an increased overspend of £2.324m within LAC agency placements (i.e. not in-house):
 - £0.113m increase relates to placement moves for 11 children. 6 stepdown moves resulted in lower cost placements, whereas 5 children moved from in-house provision to agency provision.
 - £0.536m increase relates to 9 new agency placements. Part of this cost relates to a block bed contract recently negotiated with the YMCA.
 - £1.575m increase related to additional support for 22 children who exhibited high risk behaviours or increased complexity of needs. Any short-term additional support is robustly

reviewed each month and stepped down as soon as possible. This figure includes a recharge from Lansdowne Secure Unit for East Sussex children.

- £0.502m increase was due to 6 extended placements, in 1 secure unit and 5 residential children's homes.
- £0.100m decrease came from additional income from Education for 5 children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities who are in residential care.
- £0.348m decrease was due to 12 placements ending sooner than expected. Children either stepped down to in-house provision or were placed for adoption. This is a key focus for the service, maximising use of in-house resources when it is safe and appropriate to do so.
- £0.047m increase was because of other small adjustments.
- A growth and churn calculation in LAC numbers had been added to the forecast. As we're now at year-end, this has been removed, which reduced the LAC figure by £0.704m.
- Additional income from Education, the Integrated Care Board, Virtual School, recovery of overpayments, and the Supported Accommodation reform grant, led to a reduction in spend of £0.395m in Q4.
- The Lansdowne Secure Unit ended the year with a £0.605m underspend, which was an improvement of £1.031m between Q3 and Q4. The Q4 movement was mainly due to recharging the LAC agency budget for additional agency staff who had been recruited to care for an East Sussex child in the unit. The unit received £5.125m income in the year for children placed there. £1.747m of this came from other Local Authorities and £3.38m came from the East Sussex LAC budget. In this way, the true cost of the children placed there was properly reflected, so as to demonstrate that Lansdowne could operate as a business unit.
- There were other small mitigations which decreased spend by £0.524m in Q4 amongst Careleavers and Throughcare, Fostering Services and Adoption Services.

The Localities service had an overspend of £2.760m. This improved by £0.333m in Q4:

- Salary costs have decreased by £0.229m. Ongoing work is taking place within Localities to reduce the staffing structure down to the budget available. There is £2.929m set aside as growth for Localities staffing in the Medium Term Financial Plan from 2026/27, as agreed in 2023/24 budget-setting.
- Non-staffing changes resulted in a £0.104m decrease in spend in Q4:
 - A significant contributor to the overspend in year was the statutory, non-avoidable, duties the authority has relating to intentionally homeless families. The financial position worsened by £0.167m in Q4. £0.145m of this is due to non-recoupment of rent costs from universal credit clients.
 - The family support teams saw increased pressures of £0.122m in relation to accommodation, school transport, and taxi costs.
 - Placements for children with SEND decreased by £0.309m. There were some recoupments where children have moved to another local authority and some forecast placements for long and short term care didn't materialise.
 - Other smaller movements in Parent and Baby placements, S17 ISEND Children, Special Guardianship Orders, Legal, and other totalled a £0.085m decrease in Q4.

Specialist Services ended the year with a £0.592m overspend, which was an increase of £0.300m in Q4. Recharges for staff costs from Sussex Partnership NHS Foundation Trust were £0.322m higher than projected, but this was partially mitigated elsewhere within the service.

The Early Help 0-19 service delivered an additional underspend of £0.250m in Q4, taking it to a £0.485m total underspend. The service continued with its recruitment freeze of Level 2 Keyworkers and maximised its use of grant income.

There were other small favourable movements totalling £0.166m within the Youth Justice, Connected Families, Early Help Other, Management, and Social Work & Education services.

Education underspend of £0.734m (ref ix)

Education has a budget of £129.700m and outturn expenditure of £128.966m.

There was a £0.733m improvement in Q4. £0.496m of this was within Standards and Learning Effectiveness and £0.111m was within Special Educational Needs and Disabilities.

There was a year-end underspend of £0.753m within Standards and Learning Effectiveness. £0.284m of this was an underspend on HUGG vouchers funded by the Household Support Fund. This freed up the fund to support Education service costs. There was also a reduction in the planned use of consultants within the Primary and Secondary school board budgets of £0.146m, as well as other smaller decreases totalling £0.066m.

Special Educational Needs and Disabilities finished the year with a £0.020m overspend. In Q4, there was additional funding received from the "SENDAP Change Programme" for work carried out by the Alternative Provision team.

Communication, Planning and Performance (including Home to School Transport) overspend of £3.429m (ref x)

Communication, Planning and Performance has a budget of £28.283m and outturn expenditure of £31.712m. The position improved by £0.479m in Q4.

Home to School Transport ended the year with an overspend of £3.849m, which was an improvement of £0.312m in Q4.

Since Q3, legal advice was sought, which confirmed the possibility of charging personal transport budgets for children with Education and Health Care Plans to the High Needs Block of the Dedicated Schools Grant. This mean that £0.571m of transport expenditure could be recharged.

At year-end there was £0.705m spend relating to providing transport for children from other local authorities during academic years 2023/24 and 2024/25. Due to clashing legislation issued by central Government, there is no consistent approach taken by local authorities on this matter. £0.297m of this outstanding debt has been rolled forward into financial year 2025/26, based on a calculation of debt owed by authorities who have indicated they may pay.

There were various small movements totalling a £0.167m improvement in Q4 for: Outdoor Education, Music, Planning & Performance Improvement, Safeguarding, Supported Families, Equalities & Participation, and Organisational Development.

Capital Programme Summary (ref xiv)

Children's Services had a capital budget in 2024/25 of £2.599m and outturn expenditure of £2.572m. This is an underspend of £0.027m.

There was £0.117m overspend within the Housing Adaptations for Disabled Children's Carers' Homes project (**ref xii**). A backlog of adaptations had been agreed, with a number of these being delivered in 2024/25 resulting in the overspend, however some of these will slip into 2025/26.

£0.144m budget was unspent and slipped into 2025/26 for the Essential System Development Projects (**ref xiii**). There has been a delay in part of the system purchase due to a change in ownership of the system.

Performance exceptions**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	Q4 24/25 outturn	Note ref
The percentage of eligible 2 year olds who take up a place with an eligible early years provider	ESCC: 84% Nat Avg: 73.9%	Equal to or above the national average	G	A	G	R	ESCC: 73.5% Nat Av: 74.8%	i
Average Attainment 8 score for state funded schools	Ac year 2022/23 ESCC: 43.6 Nat Av: 46.4	Ac year 2023/24 44.0	G	A	A	R	Ac Year 2023/24 ESCC: 43.1 Nat Av: 46.1	ii
Attainment 8 score Looked After Children (LAC)	Ac year 2022/23 ESCC 18.9 Nat Av 19.4	19	G	G	A	R	14.7 (provisional)	iii
The average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils	Ac Year 2022/23 ESCC: 30.3 Nat Av: 35.1	30.5	G	G	A	R	Ac Year 2023/24 ESCC: 30.1 Nat Av: 34.7	iv
The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 16, including unknowns	4.4%	Equal to or below 5%	G	G	A	G	4.2%	v
The percentage of young people who are in Not in Education, Employment or Training (NEET) at academic age 17, including unknowns	6%	Equal to or below 7%	G	G	A	G	5.7%	vi

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	2,978	(1,915)	1,063	3,240	(3,617)	(377)	(262)	1,702	1,440	vii
Early Help and Social Care	129,297	(20,151)	109,146	151,128	(29,590)	121,538	(21,831)	9,439	(12,392)	viii
Education	138,655	(8,955)	129,700	147,774	(18,808)	128,966	(9,119)	9,853	734	ix
Communication, Planning and Performance	32,583	(4,300)	28,283	39,150	(7,438)	31,712	(6,567)	3,138	(3,429)	x
Schools	154,894	(154,894)	-	154,894	(154,894)	-	-	-	-	
DSG Non Schools	-	(121,207)	(121,207)	-	(121,207)	(121,207)	-	-	-	
Total CSD	458,407	(311,422)	146,985	496,186	(335,554)	160,632	(37,779)	24,132	(13,647)	xi

Capital programme 2024/25 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget 2024/25	Actual 2024/25	Variation (Over) / under 2024/25 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	1,168	1,285	50	167	(117)	(117)	-	-	xii
Schools Delegated Capital	32,269	32,269	1,943	1,943	-	-	-	-	
Conquest Centre redevelopment	341	341	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Youth Investment Fund	193	193	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Children's Services Essential System Developments	606	606	606	462	144	-	144	-	xiii
Total CSD	34,577	34,694	2,599	2,572	27	(117)	144	0	xiv