

Children's Services – Q2 2023/24

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

Early Help and Social Care

Review of modelling and placements

Children's Services is working with IMPOWER focusing on placement sufficiency and enhancing our ability to secure the right care for the right child for the right length of time. Very ambitious targets are in place to achieve reduced spend, but only by meeting children's needs more appropriately. Children will remain at the heart of decision making. Utilising the Valuing Care approach, we are working to better identify opportunities to deliver the right care for children, including working with families to secure reunification where it is safe to do so and enhancing our recruitment strategy for our foster carers. In Q2:

- IMPOWER presented a detailed analysis of children and young people's needs in East Sussex and associated placement cost pressures in July 2023
- IMPOWER worked closely with teams and individuals within Children's Services to develop a set of proposed interventions to help us realise the opportunities identified to reduce cost and improve outcomes for children
- a multi-agency panel has been established that is taking a strength-based approach to the opportunities identified in the first cohort of children
- planning took place for the first home matching event in October
- a second larger cohort of children was identified to continue to roll out the Valuing Care approach, and training for social workers was started
- engaged with foster carers and the fostering service during August and September to identify and prioritise opportunities that will have the most impact on foster carer recruitment and retention

Rate of Children on a Child Protection (CP) Plan (per 10,000 children)

The rate of children on a CP plan (**ref iv**) has increased from 62.1 per 10,000 (662 children) at Q1 to 63 per 10,000 (671 children) at Q2. This is above the target of 62 (661 children). This measure remains under close scrutiny with a range of reviews and audits taking place to identify where it is possible to reduce the number of plans safely. The reviews and audits are focused on plans that have either been in place for 18 months plus or plans which are coming up to their second or third review. The Family Safeguarding approach, which will focus on reducing the number of children on a CP plan will be launched in January 2024.

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

The rate of LAC (**ref v**) has increased from 63.5 per 10,000 children (677 children) at Q1 to 64.4 (686 children) at Q2. This is above the target of 63.4 (676 children). Of the 686 children, 77 are unaccompanied asylum seeker children, an increase of nine children from Q1. The increase in the number and rate of LAC has continued at Q2. However, the number of children in high cost residential placements has remained stable and there have been higher numbers of children placed within their own family networks. We will continue to monitor this.

Family Hubs

We continue to develop our Family Hubs offer:

- we have launched the 'How Can I Help you?' service, available in Family Hubs, to provide direct face to face support to families and encourage them to become familiar with the locality Family Hubs provision
- new parenting groups are now available to support the transition to parenthood and help for parents with children who are neurodiverse

East Sussex is one of 15 authorities awarded trailblazer status which focuses on parent/infant relationships and perinatal mental health. We have been selected for the national evaluation of Family Hubs Trailblazers with particular interest on our triage offer for perinatal mental health and parent infant relationship support.

Our remaining nine Family Hubs will all be open in Q3 with successful launches taking place attended by children, parents/carers and stakeholders.

Supporting school attendance

In September the Early Help team started a new level 2 keywork programme which will support the Council's focus on improving school attendance. The service is aimed at supporting children with less than 50% school attendance for two school terms.

Early Adopter Programme for the Early Career Framework

In response to Stable Homes Built on Love, the DfE implementation strategy and consultation for reforming children's social care, the DfE has rolled out the Early Adopter for the Early Career Framework (years 1-5) for social workers. After a competitive application process the Council was chosen to be part of the programme. The programme will explore how local authorities deliver their:

- assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE) programme, that gives newly qualified social workers extra support during their first year of employment
- second year programmes
- developing the Professional Practice Development Programme (PPDP). The PPDP aims to train experienced practitioners and managers to support early career social workers to develop their emotional well-being and practice behaviours

The programme of individual support includes video enhanced direct observation and practice feedback to support outcomes. Additionally, we will be working in collaboration with DfE on further design and test elements of the Early Years Framework.

Recruitment of Social Workers

Following a successful recruitment campaign, in September 2023, 27 newly qualified social workers (NQS) joined the council. In 2022 we recruited 24 NQS. Since September 2022 we have recruited 19 experienced social workers and seven senior social workers. In 2021/22 we recruited 9 experienced social workers.

Lansdowne Secure Children's Home

Following a wide ranging promotional campaign, we held an open day at Lansdowne Secure Children's home in September. We had over 70 people attend on the day with representatives from Care, Health and Education on hand to answer any questions. The open day was an opportunity for interested parties to find out about the home and what it is like to work there.

As a result of the open day and promotional campaign, we received over 130 applications for Residential Support Worker roles. We have had successful recruitment across all roles and further interviews will take place in October.

Connected Coaches

Connected Families works with young people (aged 11+) who are identified as being on the edge of care or are being supported back into the care of their family. This work is informed by multidisciplinary planning and intensive support delivered by a team of connected coaches. Alongside an allocated Social Worker, the team plan and deliver interventions that support the young person, address parent/carers needs and wider systemic issues. The aim is to reduce risk, increase stability and promote the care of young people within their family. Over the last six months, 53% (17/32) of young people supported have been enabled to stay living safely at home with their families and no longer require a social worker. Those who remain open to children

services tend to be stable on their current care plan, or have stepped down the continuum of need (from child protection to child in need). There is much larger proportion of young people with complex needs who are actively engaged with the service, enabling them to remain within their family network, avoiding foster care, hospital admissions or residential care.

Habitual Knife Carriers Programme

Partnership work between Children's Services and Sussex Police, funded by the Violence Reduction Partnership, is identifying and working with young people for whom there is an escalated risk in involvement in knife crime and or carrying a weapon. The project delivers a range of support including 1-1 work, an extension of the detached out-reach offer to hotspot areas and contextual safeguarding interventions. These have focused particularly on peer groups.

44 children were supported on a 1 to 1 basis through this work between April 2022 and March 2023. Findings for this cohort from a recent external evaluation completed by the National Children's Bureau (July 2023) found a:

- 76% reduction in the number of occurrences of violent crime after the referral compared to the six months prior
- of 29 children linked to a knife possession offence in the 12 months prior to referral, 25 were linked to no further occurrences post-referral
- of 24 children linked to a violent offence as a victim in the 12 months prior to referral, 22 were linked to no further occurrences

The report highlighted the positive impact this strong partnership work has on developing solutions to improve support for children. The project has resulted in a lot of interest and learning. Good practice has been shared with other local authorities and police forces.

Education

Education East Sussex

In September we launched the restructured education division, Education East Sussex. The changes bring together the former Standards and Learning Effectiveness Service (SLES) and the Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (ISEND) service.

The restructure is designed to help the Council to deliver its core roles more effectively in leading the local education system and championing vulnerable children including children with SEND.

Our education priorities are to:

- ensure good attendance for all key stages and pupil groups
- secure strong partnerships that deliver improved educational outcomes for children and young people
- improve inclusion at all key stages for vulnerable children and young people so that they have opportunities to succeed
- ensure effective early intervention to enable all pupils to achieve
- improve the quality of leadership at all levels and key stages
- create a strong and highly effective education division to maximise the impact of our service offer

Co-production

In Q2 we made further progress on our co-production priorities. In July we launched a consultation on the new draft SEND Children and Young People's Co-Production Charter. Co-created with our partners, including children and young people with SEND, the charter:

- outlines how we will co-produce work with children and young people with SEND. This includes how children and young people's voices will be heard, acted upon and central to decisions
- provides guidance on best practice when working with children and young people with SEND

The consultation closed on 22 September. The survey results are being analysed to explore if further changes to the charter are needed.

In September, we held a co-production day with the East Sussex Parent and Carer Forum. The event explored how we can progress our SEND co-production. The event brought together practitioners, parents and carers, and young people to work on a range of different challenges. This relationship based approach is consistent with our Connected Care and Therapeutic Thinking approaches.

SEND strategy briefings

In July, we held two breakfast briefings with representatives from schools, including headteachers and SENCos (special educational needs co-ordinators), on our SEND strategy. The purpose of the sessions was to further engage schools on our joint SEND priorities, and to update on progress. We also took the opportunity to brief schools on expectations ahead of an Area SEND inspection, which will explore our local area partnership's SEND arrangements.

Employment and Skills Cross Council Management Group

The Employability and Skills team led the first biannual meeting of the Employment and Skills Cross Council Management Group in September. This new group brings together senior representatives from departments across the Council. The group will:

- support collaboration and integration on actions, contracts, funding bids and projects with an employment and skills focus
- ensure the greatest impact on external delivery for businesses, sub-contractors/suppliers, and residents, in particular young people and adults from vulnerable groups

The key themes that will be taken forward are:

- workforce development, including a long-term strategy planning for key East Sussex roles (internal and external)
- skills mapping for Transition to Net Zero. This includes what will be required in terms of provision and number of jobs

Average Attainment 8 score for state funded schools, the average Attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils and the average Attainment 8 score for Looked after Children (LAC)

Early data sets suggest that the targets for average Attainment 8 score for state funded schools (**ref i**) disadvantaged pupils (**ref ii**) and looked after children (**ref iii**) will not be met. We are awaiting the Department for Education (DfE) data and Key Stage 4 data which will not be validated until early 2024. We will provide further commentary about these targets in Q4.

Participation and strategic partnerships

Youth Voice Engagement Event

The Youth Cabinet co-designed and delivered their Youth Voice Engagement event in July. The event involved youth voice groups from across East Sussex, Lead Members, and the High Sheriff of East Sussex in workshops to share insight about young people's mandated campaigns and council priorities. Insight from these workshops:

- supported young people's understanding of local careers opportunities and informed the local careers offer
- educated young people on climate issues and gathered feedback to inform the development of a Climate Change Charter for Education settings

- added to the evidence to improve ways to communicate information, advice and guidance on mental health and emotional wellbeing
- contributed to the development of the Attendance Strategy and will create opportunities for schools, services and students to work together to improve school attendance.

Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme

The delivery of the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) programme in East Sussex this summer was the biggest yet with more than 21,000 sessions attended by more than 4,200 individual attendees. It was also the most diverse and geographically spread offer so far, with 75 providers running activities at 118 sites, helping to ensure that even families in more rural parts of the county were able to access HAF.

We continued to increase the SEND element of our programme, funding 14 specific SEND providers and providing £13,000 in additional funding to providers to increase staffing in response to bookings for those with additional needs.

Whilst the focus of the HAF programme is young people eligible for benefits-related free school meals, this year has also seen increasing demand from families in other eligible groups. Across the summer this meant that the programme also supported more than 500 young people in these wider groups, including those with SEND, Looked After Children, those on Child Protection plans, Children in Need, Young Carers, those receiving support from Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services and refugee groups.

Transition activities to support attendance

This summer, funding was made available to deliver positive activities to support young people with low attendance at primary school during their transition to secondary school. 313 young people participated, with 1,125 individual sessions attended.

The sessions enabled the attendees to make new friends, meet staff at their new school and familiarise themselves with the new site as well as to provide them with fun and engaging holiday activities.

As part of the programme, providers delivered sessions working with the young people to address concerns about school and identify barriers to attendance. It is too soon to measure the long-term impact on attendance, although the attendance of pupils who attended the programme is being tracked. The feedback from attendees and schools has been positive.

- 86% of young people said they felt more excited about starting their new school
- 81% said they felt less anxious about starting school in September after attending these sessions
- 100% of schools involved said that they would be keen to deliver this type of project again.

Revenue Budget Summary

The Departments net revenue budget is £117.4m, with a forecast overspend of £23.014m, an increase in overspend of £7.846m from Q1 (**ref x**).

The main area of projected overspend is in Early Help and Social Care of £23.322m, an increase of £6.898m from Q1 (**ref vii**), this is net of an internal transfer of £0.607m from Central Resources. (**ref vi**) and £4.325m of COVID-19 funding.

There is an underspend within Central Resources of £0.517m, a reduction of £0.783m which includes a transfer of £0.607m to Early Help and Social Care. £0.500m of the balance is an anticipated contribution from Public Health.

There remains a small overspend of £0.020m in Education and ISEND, with no movement from Q1 1(**ref viii**) and an overspend of £0.189m in Communication, Planning and Performance, with an increase from Q1 of £0.165m (**ref ix**).

Early Help and Social Care increased overspend of £6.898 to £23.322m (ref vii)

The forecast of funding for Asylum Seekers has improved by £0.193m from Q1, due to additional funding being received and all under 18-year-olds now qualifying under the National Transfer scheme.

Early Help 0-19 has received an internal transfer of £0.607m from Central Resources, this underspend is one off due to the part year impact of £1.500m of additional funding invested in year to improved school attendance, it will be fully utilised over a 12-month period.

Looked After Children (LAC) is projecting an additional £6.892m overspend from Q1 to £21.132m.

Children's Homes have increased the projected overspend by an additional £0.732m, taking the overspend to £2.5m, this is due to additional staffing costs required to support the placements at Hazel Lodge, £0.412m, and Silver Birches, £0.296m.

The respite units at Dorset Road and Sorrel Drive are also projecting additional pressure from Q1 of £0.802m with Dorset Road having an additional staff cost of £0.557m and Sorrel Drive projecting additional costs of £0.245m, most of these costs are agency wraparound support costs.

The main pressure is within External Residential costs, where an additional overspend of £5.012m is anticipated on top of that projected at Q1. June saw the numbers of children and young people requiring residential placements, which includes supported accommodation and secure accommodation, peak at 150 (this figure excludes Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children (UASC)). The number of children and young people in these types of placements have plateaued in Q2, with September data showing a slight reduction to 144.

However, the average cost of residential care packages has increased by 13% since Q1. The complex care needs of a relatively small number of children mean that there are further pressures on this budget area. Over the course of the year to date there have been 29 looked after children who have had at some time care packages between £10,000 - £20,000 per week; at the end of quarter 2 there were 12 children whose care costs fell in this bracket. The additional projected overspends since Q1 are summarised below:

- a small number of high cost placements have been extended, till March 2024. This is felt to be a realistic timeframe for the placements, with close scrutiny applied bi-monthly to high cost packages of support, £1.1m
- placement moves to new higher cost placement following notice being given by previous provider, and from in house residential to bespoke new high cost placements due to complex needs, £2.9m
- additional "wraparound" support required to maintain a number of placements, this includes a large sibling group who have required a significant package of additional support to maintain their placement together, £1.0m

The projected underspends on Agency foster carers and in house foster carers services have reduced by £0.238m, and £0.221m respectively since Q1, this is in the main due to incentives being paid to carers to support placements.

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. Whilst no savings have been realised in Q2 we anticipate reductions in cost of packages of about £0.250m whilst delivering better outcomes for children.

Lansdowne is projecting an additional £0.136m overspend:

Recruitment is progressing with the intention of opening the unit in early 2024. A phased opening with increased occupancy rates is planned to start from 2 January 2024. 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.

LAC is projecting a slightly smaller overspend of £0.121m, due mainly to reduction of the projected overspend on care leavers staffing costs.

Fostering Services is projecting a reduced overspend, due to a revised income projection of £0.081m.

LAC management are projecting a slight reduction in overspend of £0.050m due to staff moving back to support the opening of Lansdowne.

Localities is projecting an additional £0.926m of overspend from Q1:

The main reason for the increase is due to taking on additional numbers of social workers from September costing an additional £0.459m. In addition, the west teams have seen increases in staff costs of £0.198m to support students with travel, accommodation, and nursery costs. Care costs include additional accommodation costs of £0.121m for an ISEND child and the parent and baby placements have a new case costing £0.031m. A subscription for supporting Kinship Reach has cost £0.056m. Additional impact of homelessness has contributed a further £0.093m.

As noted in the cover report, 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.

Central Resources reduction in underspend of £0.783m to £0.517m (ref vi)

This includes a movement of £0.607m from Central Resources to Early Help and Social Care of the one-off unspent attendance investment (£1.5m investment), increase in legal fees over budget of £0.176m

Communication, Planning and Performance increase in overspend variance of £0.167m to £0.189m:

The increase in the projected overspend is due to £0.068m investment in a reviewing officer post for safeguarding, £0.034m for additional staff to reduce subject access requests and an increase of £0.065m in home to school transport.

Capital Programme Summary

The Capital Programme for 2023/24 is a £1.447m projected spend against a budget of £1.215m (**ref xi**). The additional spend is the Council's contribution towards projects that 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	Q2 23/24 outturn	Note ref
Average attainment 8 score for state funded schools	Ac Year 2021/22 ESCC: 46.5 Nat Av: 48.9	Ac Year 2022/23 46.5	G	A			To be reported at Q3	i
Average attainment 8 score for disadvantaged pupils	Ac Year 2021/22 ESCC: 33.3 Nat Av: 37.7	Ac Year 2022/23 33.3	G	A			To be reported at Q3	ii
Average Attainment 8 score for Looked After Children (LAC)	AC Year 2021/22 ESCC: 23.9 NAT AV: 20.3	Ac Year 22/23 19	G	A			To be reported at Q4	iii

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	Q2 23/24 outturn	Note ref
Rate of children with a Child Protection Plan (per 10,000 children)	64.8 691 children	62.0 661 children	A	R			63.0 671 children	iv
Rate of Looked After Children (per 10,000 children)	62.3 664 children	63.4 676 children	A	R			64.4 686 children	v

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	2,242	(1,332)	910	1,725	(1,332)	393	517	-	517	vi
Early Help and Social Care	98,872	(16,426)	82,446	122,005	(16,237)	105,768	(23,133)	(189)	(23,322)	vii
Education and ISEND	111,954	(8,177)	103,777	113,898	(10,101)	103,797	(1,944)	1,924	(20)	viii
Communication, Planning and Performance	31,385	(4,340)	27,045	34,614	(7,380)	27,234	(3,229)	3,040	(189)	ix
DSG non Schools	-	(96,778)	(96,778)	-	(96,778)	(96,778)	-	-	-	
Schools	157,134	(157,134)	-	157,134	(157,134)	-	-	-	-	
Total CSD	401,587	(284,187)	117,400	429,376	(288,962)	140,414	(27,789)	4,775	(23,014)	x

Capital programme 2023/24 (£'000)

Approved project	Budget: total project all years	Projected: total project all years	Budget Q2	Actual to date Q2	Projected 2023/24	Variation (Over) / under Q2 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	1,322	50	20	282	(232)	(232)	-	-	
Schools Delegated Capital	29,673	29,673	1,150	316	1,150	-	-	-	-	
Conquest Centre redevelopment	356	356	15	-	15	-	-	-	-	
Youth Investment Fund	193	193	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	
Total CSD	31,312	31,544	1,215	336	1,447	(232)	(232)	0	0	xi