

Committee Report

PURPOSE: Final Decision Report

KEY OR NON-KEY DECISION: Non-key decision

COMMITTEE: Children and Young People Committee

DATE: 06 March 2025

TITLE: Children and Young People Policy Committee Update Report

Ward(s): All wards

Officer presenting the report: Hannah Woodhouse **Job title:** Executive Director Children and Education (DCS)

Committee Chair: Cllr Christine Townsend

Executive Director lead: Hannah Woodhouse: Executive Director for Children and Education

Proposal origin: Committee Chair

Purpose of Report: To provide the Children and Young People's Policy Committee information on the delivery and performance of children's services in line with the statutory expectations of the Director of Children's Services. The report identifies key challenges and risks for consideration, areas of progress, and upcoming activity.

Introduction

1. Tragically the end of January and start of February marked the one year anniversary of the deaths of Max Dixon, Mason Rist and Darrian Williams and a further young person sustained life changing injuries. The sentencing process has seen a number of young people and adults receive life sentences for these murders. Then on the 18th February 2024 Fares, Joury and Mohammed Bash died in Sea Mills. There have been a number of events to remembers the lives of these children over the past weeks and we want to recognise the tragedy and sadness borne by the families and communities affected as well as the wider partners and staff working across the city who were deeply affected. Two Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews have been commissioned by the Keeping Bristol Safe Partnership and will be produced shortly with a view to reflect on how we can learn from these tragic events.
2. Following endorsement by this committee the **Families First transformation programme** has moved into the mobilisation stage alongside our strategic partners before we enter the delivery phase in April 2025. We are pleased with the enthusiasm from staff regarding the programme, and we have now recruited from with the service a business change lead and design leads to focus on delivery areas and to baseline our plan. Recruiting into new operating model continues to provide additional capacity and

leadership, with the Head of Service for the children’s front door and services for harm outside the home, and managers within the newly created service for adolescents.

- The **Children’s Quality, Improvement and Performance (QuIP) Board** continues to ensure oversight and grip of performance and practice within Bristol children’s services and the delivery of statutory duties in relation to children and families. The Board met in January and February 2025 and agenda items included a review of Children Missing Education and Electively Home Educated children, implementation of improvements within First assessment Service, and review of strategic commissioning arrangements for children in care. Updates are provided within this report.

Performance Position (as at 31 December 2024)

- Directorate performance management arrangements ensure that performance information is monitored at a team, service and directorate level to ensure delivery of services and impact for children. Any exceptions, risks and progress are escalated to the children’s Quality Improvement and Performance (QuIP) Board which also reviews a suite of key metrics across the children’s system to maintain oversight and ensure delivery of improvement plans.
- Table 1 below provides a snapshot of key metrics that facilitate this committee’s continued oversight. Data reported is either a month-end snapshot or full month performance. Direction of travel (DoT) arrow and colour indicates improved or declined performance from previous month / period where appropriate.

Table 1: Performance snapshot as at 31st December 2024.

Performance measure	Latest data (31 Dec 2024)	Change since last month/term	Change since last year	Target	England average	DoT
No. of new requests for Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) needs assessments	148	-3	+408 (YTD)	N/A	N/A	↓
No. of children awaiting EHCP needs assessment	1,238	+55	+581	N/A	N/A	↑
No. of new EHCPs finalised	61	-20	-42 (YTD)	N/A	N/A	↓
% of EHC plans finalised in 20 weeks ¹	2%	-1ppts	-41ppts	50%	50.3%	↓
No. of children awaiting specialist provision	250	+20	+37	N/A	N/A	↑
% of 16-17 year olds not in education, employment or training (NEET) or Not Known	6.6%	+1.1ppts	-0.8	5%	6.2%	↑
No. of children missing education (CME)	371	-87	-108	N/A	N/A	↓
No. of children electively home educated (EHE)	735	+10	+67	N/A	N/A	↑

¹ Percentage of plans finalised in December 2024 completed in 20 week timescale. 17% YTD for 2024.

Performance measure	Latest data (30 Nov 2024)	Change since last month/term	Change since last year	Target	England average	DoT
% of children in care in full time education	88.1%	0	-1.5ppts	95%	N/A	↔
Total school attendance rate (2024/25 Term 2)	91.5%	-1.6ppts	-0.3ppts	95%	93.4%	↓
Total school suspension rate (2024/25 Term 2) ²	2.8	+0.1	-0.1	N/A	N/A	↑
Permanent exclusion rate (2024/25) ³	0.03	+0.01	+0.04	N/A	N/A	↑
Number of contacts to First Response	1,987	-137	+258	N/A	N/A	↓
Number of referrals to children's social care	306	-60	+43	N/A	N/A	↓
% re-referrals to children's social care in last 12 months	25%	-3ppts	+1ppt	23%	22%	↓
% children's assessments completed within timescale	87%	-3ppts	+14ppt	85%	82%	↓
Rate children starting a Child Protection Plan for a second or subsequent time	38%	+14ppts	-12ppt	24%	24%	↑
Number of children subject of a Child Protection Plan	422	-8	+3	N/A	N/A	↓
Number of children in care	764	-23	-6	N/A	N/A	↓
Short term home placement stability (children in care with 3 or more home placements in the last 12 months)	7%	0ppts	0ppt	8%	10%	.
Long term home placement stability (children in care under 16 yrs who have been in care for 2.5+ years in same home for 2+ yrs)	66%	0ppts	+2ppt	70%	69%	↑

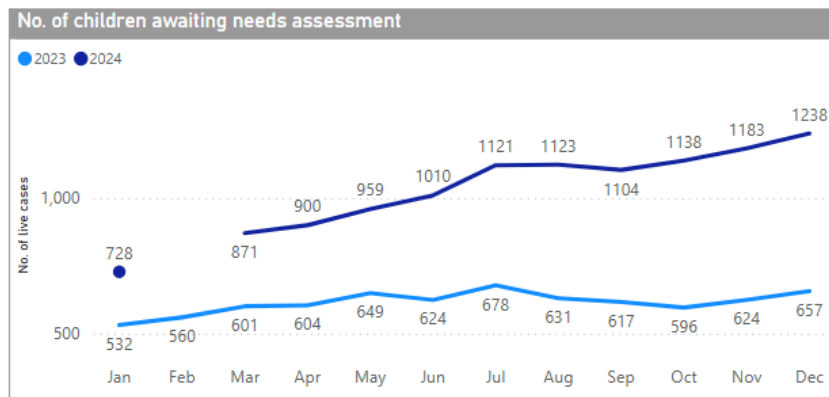
Performance headlines (as at 31st December 2024):

- There has been a sustained 34% increase in initial requests for Education Health and Care (EHC) needs assessments received in 2024, compared to 2023. This means that the number of children awaiting an EHC needs assessment increased in December 2024 to 1,238, significantly above the same time period last year when there 657 children awaiting an assessment (+88%).
- The SEND service is in the process of a restructure which will increase the capacity of the service and reduce average caseloads. Recruitment processes will begin once the restructure process has concluded. We will also increase the capacity of Educational Psychologists (EPs). This is against a backdrop of a national shortage of EPs. Recent changes in the ways of working following a review have improved the productivity of the service by 14%, whereby EPs are completing more reports than in the

² Bristol data is internal data and excludes one school.

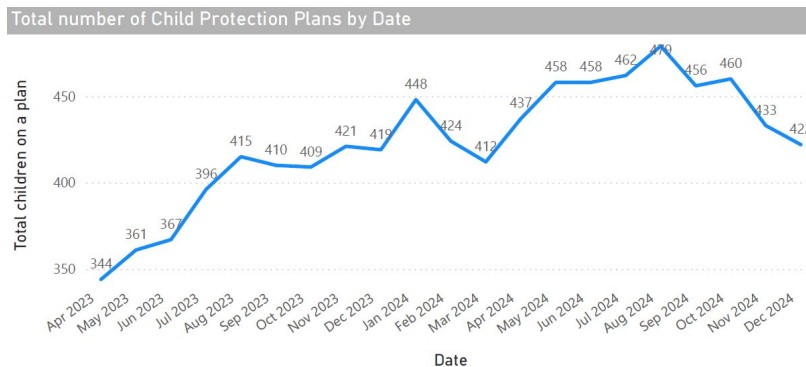
³ Bristol data is internal data and excludes one school. This is the YTD rate for exclusions as at the end of term 2

previous year.

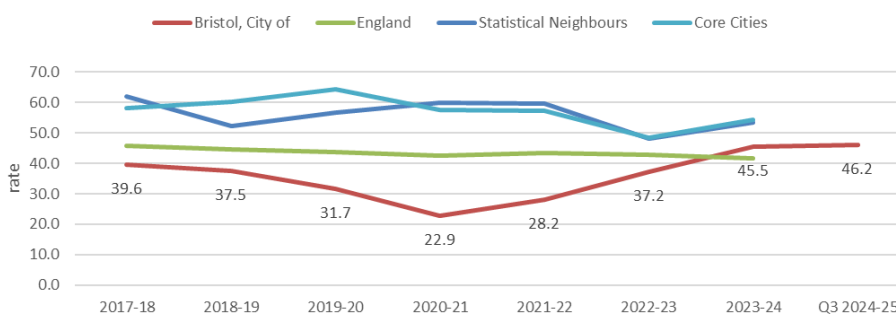


8. Partly as a result of the scale of assessment requests, only 2% of EHC plans finalised in December 2024 were issued within the 20-week timescale. Year to date timeliness for 2024 is 17%, a reduction from 48% at the end of 2023. For 2024, the average time from request to issue a final EHC Plan is 42.3 weeks.
9. There was an increase in the number of children missing education (CME) at the start of the academic year (660). This has been decreasing month on month to 371 in December 2024 and is below the figure for the previous year. We are looking in more detail into the reasons why these children are not on the roll of a school and will provide more information in due course.
10. The number of pupils electively home educated (EHE) has increased since the start of the academic year and is at 735 at the end of December 2024, although in-year benchmarking shows we have a relatively low EHE rate compared with all England and statistical neighbour LAs.
11. The proportion of children in care in full-time education has remained at 88.1% in December and continues to be below the previous academic year.
12. The overall attendance rate decreased between term 1 and term 2 from 93.1% to 91.5%. Attendance rates have dropped across all phases. This is the same trend as seen in previous years. Term 2 2024/25 sees an increased rate of suspensions compared to term 1 2024/25 with 1,722 suspensions and 1,025 pupils suspended. There have been 22 exclusions. This remains a citywide improvement priority.
13. The number of contacts about children to First Response decreased to 1,987 in December 2024 (-137 from previous month). We have received 18,891 contacts about children this financial year, which is a 3% increase on the same period in 2023/24.
14. The rate of repeat referrals to children's social care increased to 25% in December 2024 and is 23.7% for year to date which is slightly above the England average for 2023/24 (22.4%). This remains a focus for management quality assurance.
15. Assessment timeliness continues to show an improved picture. 87% of assessments were completed within timescales in December 2024, a small decrease on previous month but significantly higher than the rest of the year so far. This will continue to be monitored to ensure this improved performance is maintained.
16. The number of children subject to a Child Protection Plan decreased in December 2024 to 422 from 430

in November 2024. Bristol has a rate of 46 children the subject of a Child Protection Plan per 10,000 children which is higher than national average (42 per 10,000), but remains below statistical neighbour (53 per 10,000) and core city (54 per 10,000) averages.

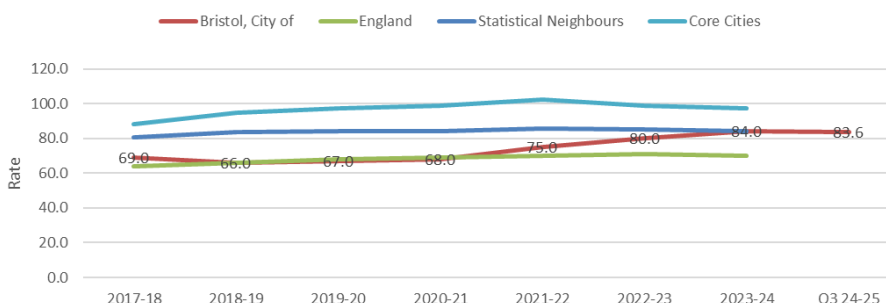


Rate of children who were the subject of a child protection plan at 31 March per 10,000 children



17. There was a decrease in the number of children in care to 764 children at the end of December 2024 from 782 at the end of November 2024 and reflects a year end position similar to the previous year. The rate of children in care (84 per 10,000 children) remains in line with statistical neighbours and well below core cities (97 per 10,000).

Rate of children looked after at 31 March per 10,000 children aged under 18 years



18. The long-term stability of children in care improved slightly to 66%, while short term placement stability remains good at 7%. There were 77 children seeking asylum, 10% of our children in care.

Early Years, Education and Skills

19. We are launching this week the development of an **education vision for Bristol with a focus specifically on breaking the link between low achievement and children living in poverty** which is a theme which continues to plague outcomes across our city and across all communities. This work is being spearheaded by Sir Jon Coles who led the London Challenge school improvement model in the early 2000s, was Director General for Schools at the DfE and now runs a large academy trust. All schools and trusts are working together to develop a single strategy which will support improvement across the city with a focus on targeted improvement, tackling racism in schools, and an area-based lens especially on attendance. It will also build citywide support to make sure all children can access the resources of the city, where leadership and teaching quality can flourish and services can work with schools to support vulnerable children and families.
20. The local authority is focusing on high quality and appropriate support for maintained schools through a **revised school improvement framework**. This will be supported by a strategic vision for education in Bristol, developing and improving system leadership. This will also complement the regional improvement for standards and excellence (RISE) teams that will provide targeted intervention to schools that Ofsted identifies as needing to improve, and a universal service for all schools which will act as a catalyst for collaboration and improvement across all settings working closely with the Local Authority and Trusts.
21. Ofsted are currently consulting on a **new approach to inspecting education providers** and the introduction of report cards, the consultation runs until April 2025. The consultation sets out a series of proposals that aim to serve the interests of the parents and children, while strengthening the trust and cooperation of professionals working in the services it inspects and regulates. Proposals for a new inspection model include introduction of a report card and replacing the 'single word judgement' with a new 5-point grading scale for each evaluation area. There will also be increased focus on support for disadvantaged and vulnerable children and learners, including children with SEND.
22. **Primary school places and proposed Published Admission Number (PAN) reductions for 2026/2027.** The decrease in overall demand is forecast to continue into the foreseeable future. After the primary school first round application deadline in January 2025, Bristol school admissions received 123 fewer first preference applications for reception 2025 compared to the same time last year. (4,527 and 4,647). The local authority have taken a citywide approach to best address the current surplus of primary places. We have been working with school leaders and Trusts to reduce PAN. Consultations at six Bristol primary schools proposing PAN reductions for 2026/2027 took place in December and January and a final decision will be made on a further two schools will be made before the end of February and published by 15th March, in accordance with the statutory deadlines set by the Department for Education (DfE).
23. In 2025, Bristol City Council will be working in partnership with the city's schools and Trusts to publish an updated school organisation strategy which will widen the scope to address falling demand. We will also be supporting all our schools in managing declining pupil numbers.
24. **Secondary School Places.** In line with the LA forecasts, year 7 applications for September 2025 are lower than those received this time last year, but we still expect places at most of our schools to be in very high demand. Opening of the permanent Oasis Temple Quarter site has been delayed further to September 2027 at the soonest and the school will be on their temporary site for longer than

anticipated. We will continue to work with our schools who have the capacity to accept pupils above their agreed PAN in order to ensure sufficiency of places ready for national offer day on 3rd March 2025.

25. The February QuIP Board meeting reviewed the current position in relation to **Children Missing Education (CME) and Elective Home Education (EHE)** CME and EHE update. Our rate of CME fluctuates, peaking significantly in the autumn term, largely due to increased rates of pupil mobility over the summer months and has now reduced to a rate of 0.6%, which is in line with the England average. Five percent of Bristol children missing education have been CME for over 12 months, compared with 17% nationally. On census day (3rd Oct 2024) our rate of EHE by our school age population was 1.1% (670 children) compared with England average of 1.4%.
26. Key areas of challenge include children moving to Bristol with SEND or complex Needs, mainstream in-year secondary admissions, and the interface between children being permanently excluded from school and CME. Work is underway to improve processes and practice, including working with DfE on national policy development, and to improve the monitoring and timeliness of our work with children. A full update will be provided at the next committee meeting.

SEND and Inclusion

27. A progress report on managing the deficit within the Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) High Needs Block is provided as a separate agenda item. The report also provides a summary overview of progress of the significant deficit mitigation workstreams and inclusion projects, which includes the recent increase in capacity of the SEND service and further increases in Educational Psychologist capacity. Alongside improvements in processes and in ways of working this will improve the quality and timeliness of children's assessments.

Early Help and Keeping Children Safe

28. Quality assurance and service-level performance arrangements continue to feed into our Children's Quality, Improvement and Performance (QuIP) Board. The January 2025 QuIP Board reviewed proposals within the **new children and family services neighbourhood model** that will change how the local authority can carry out assessments and provide support under section 17 of the Children Act 1989. These changes will be made in line with the government's latest statutory guidance Working Together to Safeguard Children 2023. In the new model alternatively qualified practitioners will have lead professional responsibility for the social care assessment, planning and delivery of services to children and their families, managed closely by a consultant social worker.
29. The Board were assured around the training, management oversight and career progression arrangements within the proposal and were supportive of the intended benefits of created more manageable workloads and effective practice within family help while also making better use of the experience held by our Family Support Workers. A local protocol for the new model, outlining who can be a lead practitioner for assessments and support under section 17, has been developed with partners for approval by the Keeping People Safe partnership Board.
30. The DfE / DHSC-funded **Family Hubs and Start for Life Programme** is another key element of the Bristol neighbourhood model. The programme's core objective is to improve access to integrated universal and early help family services, including Start for Life services, in areas with the highest levels of

deprivation and disproportionately poor health and educational outcomes. Through the programme, Bristol has opened three Family Hubs across the city (Hartcliffe, Southmead and Well Spring Settlement) and developed a citywide digital offer (Bristol Family Hubs), which is available to all families. On 3 February 2025, Strategy and Resources Policy Committee agreed to accept and spend up to £1,718,900 (provisional maximum allocation) Family Hubs and Start for Life funding allocation for 2025/26. Year four funding will be focused on expanding the reach of the physical Family Hub offer, through the opening of new hubs and embedding existing programmes and approaches.

31. Our **Assessed and Supported Year in Employment (ASYE) programme** for Newly Qualified Social Workers (NQSW) is a key part of our strategy to recruit and retain a high quality children's social care workforce. Skills for Care, who fund the programme, undertook a quality assurance visit in Bristol in October 2024, which included interviews with NQSWs and a review of the Bristol programme. The visit found that NQSWs are well supported in Bristol, with good leadership commitment and noted the work of the senior social worker in the practice development team in supporting ASYE staff and leading the programme.
32. Work continues across the city to develop our **responses to serious violence** in partnership with communities and we continue to develop a number of work strands within a wider strategy to prevent extra familial harm to children and young people. There are many aspects to this work, but one key area has been how schools and trusts can work together to identify and prevent young people from vulnerabilities to exploitation. We were pleased to welcome Jon Yates the CEO of the Youth Endowment Foundation to work with a group of schools and trusts at their invitation to share and develop best practice and hope to continue to develop this work across the city.
33. The January 2025 QuIP Board received an on improvement activity within **First Assessment Service** which is our single point of access for all requests for help and protection for children in Bristol. This included improved timeliness of decision-making and increased use of our multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements with partners. This was followed by a quality assurance visit by the independent chair of the QuIP Board, which found that the system was working effectively with good oversight and recommended a continued focus on ensuring timeliness of decision making. Ofsted then carried out a focused visit of our front door arrangements on 18 and 19 February 2025, under the ILACS (inspecting local authority children's services) inspection framework, to review progress made in this area since the full standard inspection in January 2023. A full update will be provided following publication of findings.

Prioritising Children in Our Care

34. A full progress update on delivery of the Corporate Parenting Strategy is provided as a separate report on this agenda. This includes formation of a multi-agency programme board to deliver the strategy and the Full Council decision on 14 January 2025 to formally recognise care experience as a protected characteristic. We now join over 100 other local authorities in the UK who recognise care experience as a locally protected characteristic. At a national level, care experienced is not currently a protected characteristic under the *Equality Act 2010*. Care-experienced individuals in Bristol will be safeguarded against discrimination and can anticipate fair treatment in employment, education, and service access.

Working in Partnership

35. A visit was undertaken by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) in January 2025 to review arrangements for supporting young people at risk of homelessness. Children's services and Housing services were praised for the joint work to improve our pathway housing offer for young people and our work with care leavers, including Unaccompanied Asylum Seeking care leavers.

Officer Recommendations:

1. That the Children and Young People Policy Committee note this report.

Corporate Strategy alignment: Children and Education Services play a critical role in delivering corporate strategy commitments across all its themes. The majority of key activity referred to in this report falls within two themes: children and young people: A city where every child belongs and every child gets the best start in life, whatever circumstances they were born into; and Economy and skills: Economic growth that builds inclusive and resilient communities, decarbonises the city and offers equity of opportunity.

City Benefits: This report supports the committee's understanding of delivery of children's services to improve outcomes for children and families in Bristol

Consultation Details: The content of this report has been discussed with Divisional Management Teams and Executive Director Meetings.

Background Documents:

1. [Working together to safeguard children 2023: statutory guidance](#)
2. [Improving the way Ofsted inspects education - GOV.UK](#)
3. [Family Hubs and Start for Life programme - GOV.UK](#)
4. [Family Hubs Key Decisions, 3 February 2025](#)
5. [Inspecting local authority children's services - GOV.UK](#)
6. [Bristol Ofsted ILACS inspection report January 2023](#)

1. Finance Advice: Whilst there are no direct financial implications arising from this specific report, this report does highlight very serious issues that are directly influencing expenditure within the directorate. With the directorate overspending significantly in both social care and special education provision, actions that are detailed in this report to address demand pressures and control expenditure are welcome, but are presently off expected progress. Improved sufficiency of in-house care placements and improved recruitment and retention of foster carers is to be welcomed where this avoids more costly and more distant provision, as is improved recruitment and retention of social workers where this reduces the need for more expensive agency provision. The pressures on EHCPNAs remain of concern, whereby these represent a growing pressure upon High Needs budgets and Transport provision. Transformation of service delivery alongside improved early help is planned to address these financial concerns.

Finance Business Partner: Travis Young Finance Business Partner, Children & Education 26 February 2025

2. Legal Advice: This report is for noting and will assist the Committee in ensuring the Council is complying with its statutory duty and statutory guidance.

Legal Team Leader: Husinara Jones, Team Manager/Solicitor, 26 February 2025

3. Implications on IT: I.T. are supportive and available to aid in progressing relevant work and can be engaged through the existing work request process.

IT Team Leader: Alex Simpson – Lead Enterprise Architect, 26 February 2025

4. HR Advice: There are no significant HR implications for BCC employees arising from this report.

HR Partner: James Brereton (Head of Human Resources), 26 February 2025.

APPENDICES

Appendix A – Further essential background / detail on the proposal	NO
Appendix B – Equality Impact Assessment (EqIA)	NO
Appendix C – Environmental Impact Assessment (Environmental Impact Assessment	NO
Appendix D – Decision Risk Assessment	NO
Appendix E – Exempt Information	NO
Appendix F – Details of consultation carried out - internal and external	NO
Appendix G – Options appraisal matrix	NO
Appendix H – Business case / financial analysis	NO