

People Scrutiny Commission

27th September 2023



Report of: Vanessa Wilson, Director of Children and Education Transformation

Title: Children and Education – Our Families Programme Update on Demand Pressures

Officer Presenting Report: Vanessa Wilson, Director of Children and Education Transformation

Recommendation:

For the People Scrutiny Commission to note the report and provide comment and feedback on opportunities to manage the demands to mitigate further against the financial challenges Children and Education face due to national and local picture.

The significant issues in the report are:

1. Continuing financial pressure and challenges that Children and Education are facing as outlined at Cabinet 5th September [Finance Exception Report](#)
2. Increasing demands (national and local) regarding to children/young people placements, Special Education Needs Education Health Care Plans and Home to School Travel and how the Children and Education transformation programme known as Our Families to mitigate against further deterioration.
3. CIPFA performance tracker, 2023 reports on trends in children's services spending, and found that LAs spent £11.1 billion on children's social care in 2021/22, a 41% rise in real terms compared to 2009, while the children's population grew by less than 10% over the same period.
4. The UK has sleepwalked into a dysfunctional children's social care market. This has left local authorities hamstrung in their efforts to find suitable and affordable placements in children's homes or foster care.
5. The number of children, young people eligible for Home to School Travel support is continuing to increase year on year direct correlation to the increase in education health care plans. The number of children, young people with an education health care plans continues to increase at a significant rate.
6. Lack of school capacity within Bristol is increasing the number of routes outside of those areas, thereby increasing the Home to School Travel costs significantly.
7. It is recognised that the national and local picture will not change soon, and any recovery plans being delivered within 23/24 will only ensure that the current pressure does not deteriorate further, enable savings in 24/25 and long-term sustainability.

1. Summary

- 1.1 Children and Education services are operating in a complex and challenging environment, balancing the tension between delivering essential improvements, managing demand pressures and Medium-Term Financial Plan savings delivery.
- 1.2 The urgency of Children and Education transformation programme known as ‘Our Families’ correlates to the current improvements required now and in the long-term, the financial position, delivering our statutory duties, performance, increasing demands on services and long-term sustainability of the directorate. The programme is a whole system change by a "relentless focus on doing things well, coupled with innovation".
- 1.3 The General Fund is currently forecasting a risk adjusted overspend of £12.1m, 2.5%, on the approved budget of £483.5m as outlined at Cabinet 5th September [Finance Exception Report](#). This reflects a deterioration of £12.1m in the period. Children and Education account for this new pressure.
- 1.4 The Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) revised budget, including amounts recouped by the Education and Skills Funding Agency for Academies, is £452.3m against which it is forecasting an £18.7m (4.1%) in-year deficit. This is primarily driven by High Needs spend increases in EHCP assessments and need. This in-year forecast overspends, when combined with the prior year’s carried forward deficit of £39.7m, brings the forecast total accumulated carried forward in to 2024/25 deficit £58.3m.
- 1.5 Key challenges of our current financial pressures align to the national challenges and local picture as outlined below are associated to workforce recruitment and retention; cost of placements of children, young people; lack of local provision; home to school travel and education health care plans as outlined in Special Education Needs and Disability performance report. Further information around costs, trends, performance data and opportunities are outlined in Appendix B.
- 1.6 It is recognised that the national and local picture will not change soon, and Our Families Programme plans being delivered within 23/24 will only ensure that the current pressure does not deteriorate further, enable savings in 24/25 onwards and long-term sustainability.

2. Context

2.1 Our Families Programme:

Our Families Programme brings together all change activity within Children, Families, Safer Communities, Education and Skills, covering both Dedicated Schools Grant and Non-Dedicated Schools Grant (General Fund). [Our Families Programme](#) was approved at Cabinet 6th June. The overview of the programme, its governance and focus is outlined in Appendix A.

The programme will design effective services with, and for, children, young people and families; and efficiency of delivery will improve as a result through a whole system change. There is a systemic relationship between the programme areas of focus and deliverables because greater stability will not be achieved by focusing on one area alone.

There are three angles from which we are approaching the challenge:

- DEMAND – tackling the number of children, young people and families that need our support and reducing the level of cost and need through alternative models and initiatives.
- SUPPLY – how we organise our resources and commission to respond to that demand and, within that.
- WORKFORCE – how we organise and support our staff to deliver the most effective and timely response to children, young people and families.

The key outcomes being:

- Delivered sustainable, long-term improvements to our services, including improved governance, quality assurance, compliance, practice and performance.
- Secured better value for money through a balanced budget by addressing the drivers for the increase in spend and future-proofed the service against increasing demand.
- Resources are deployed efficiently and effectively, with decisions on service development informed by insight, quality and cost analysis.
- Developed more effective working relationships with parents, carers, families, key stakeholders and partners.
- Strengthened the capacity and capability of our workforce - developing the workforce to deliver a children/young persons centered approach.

2.2 National and Local Challenges – Workforce Recruitment and Retention

Almost one in five (19%) children’s social worker posts in England lying vacant as of June 2022, up from 14.6% a year previously, according to an Association of Directors of Children’s Services (ADCS) survey of 108 of the 152 authorities. As of September 2021, the figure for all councils was 16.7% (see graph).



One in six roles (16.7%) filled by agency social workers as of last June, up from 15.6% in June 2021, according to the same study, the ADCS’s latest safeguarding pressures report. 70% of directors saying they were not confident they would have enough permanent child and family social workers in post over the subsequent years.

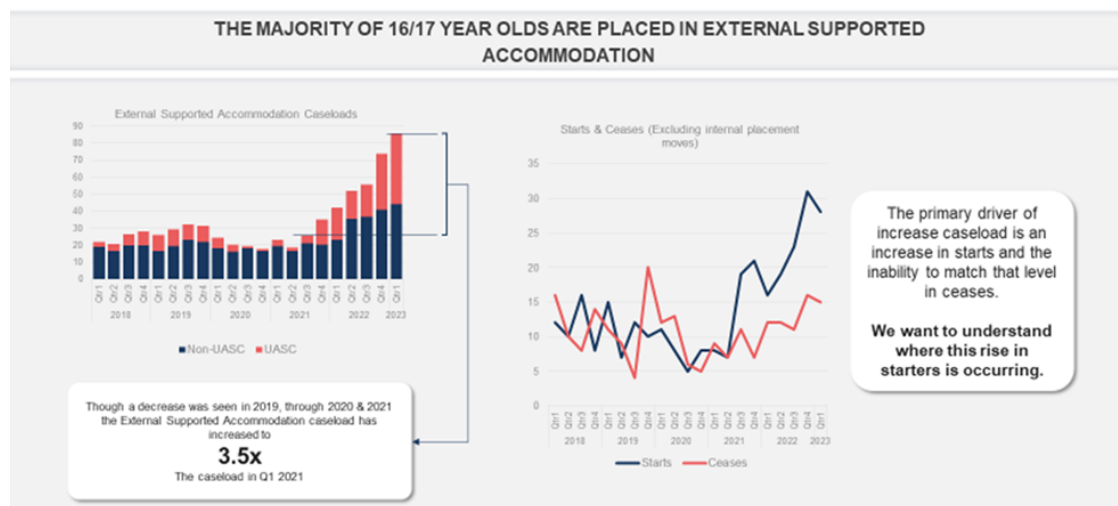
Workforce situation in Bristol had deteriorated in the second half of 2022, due to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis, high cost of housing/rents, higher workloads, market rates for critical statutory roles not aligning to market rates and increasing public negativity towards the profession in the light of the Arthur Labinjo-Hughes and Star Hobson cases.

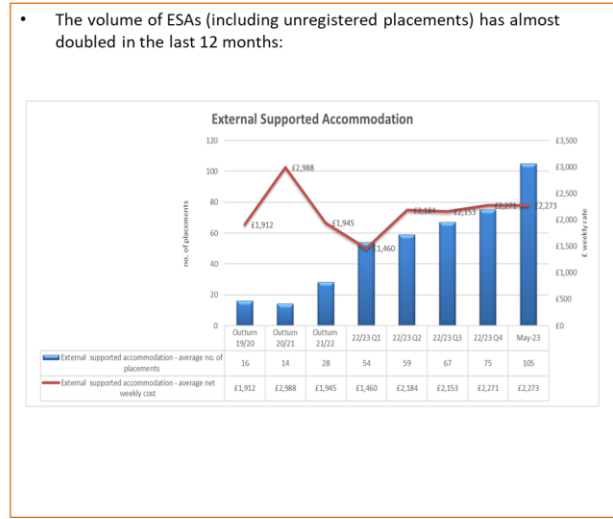
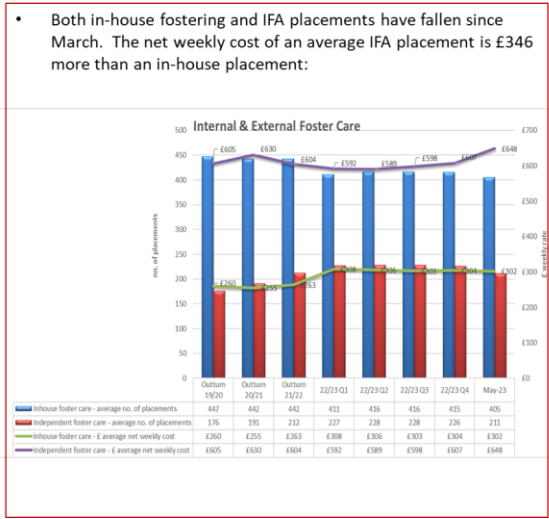
Increasing cost of using agency staff is causing significant pressures on establishment budgets. Local workforce shortages are adding to the challenges facing our local services. In the coming years, some services are likely to continue to see a significant increase in demand which they will not be able to meet without an increase in the supply of skilled staff.

2.3 National and Local Challenges – Placements

“The UK has sleepwalked into a dysfunctional children’s social care market. This has left local authorities hamstrung in their efforts to find suitable and affordable placements in children’s homes or foster care.

Bristol performs well in having care leavers living in suitable accommodation, but there remains a housing challenge in the city particularly for young people with more complex needs, increasing numbers of children placed far from home where it is not in their best interests all of which we are seeking to address in the housing recommissioning programme which will be presented to the council this autumn. In addition, despite all efforts, Bristol has a lack foster carers to meet the needs within the system.



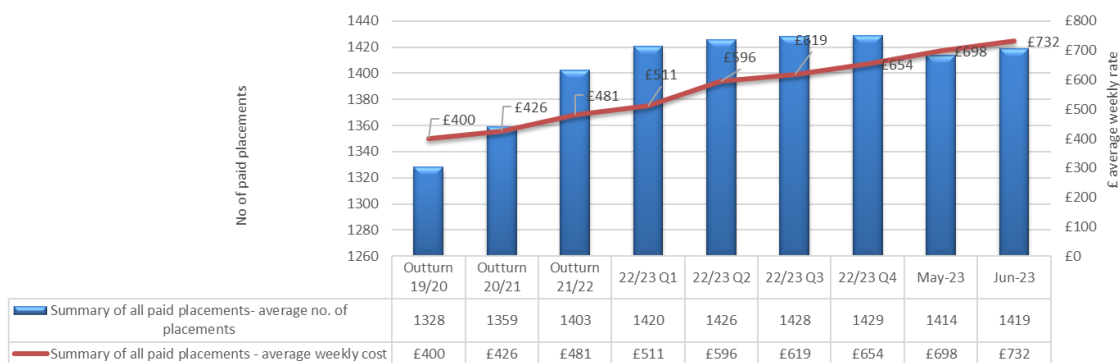


CIPFA performance tracker, 2023 reports that LAs spent £11.1 billion on children’s social care in 2021/22, a 41% rise in real terms compared to 2009, while the children’s population grew by less than 10% over the same period. Bristol has seen 16+ figures and the growth in this demographic as well as the growth through Unaccompanied Asylum Seeker Children. New statutory regulation of this sector which may push our costs up.

Significant problems in how the placements market is functioning there are not enough placements of the right kind, in the right places, which means that children are not consistently getting access to care and accommodation that meets their needs. The largest private providers of placements are making materially higher profits and charging materially higher prices than would be expected from a functioning market.

The national private residential placement costs increased the most, by 90.56%, while local authority’s placement costs increased by 18.78%. For Bristol there has been a slight reduction in the overall number of placements since March 2023, however the average net weekly cost has increased by £78 (11.9%).

Summary of all paid placements and care arrangements



Children’s Home Association’s State of the Sector Survey 2023 highlighted the private sector’s approach to formal procurement and tendering, with over a third not engaging with formal processes (twice as many as in 2021) and half of all providers selectively considering which tenders to bid for. 22% of all providers also reported choosing to leave a commissioned framework in the last year, all of whom experienced no negative consequences following the

decision (up from 17% in 2022).

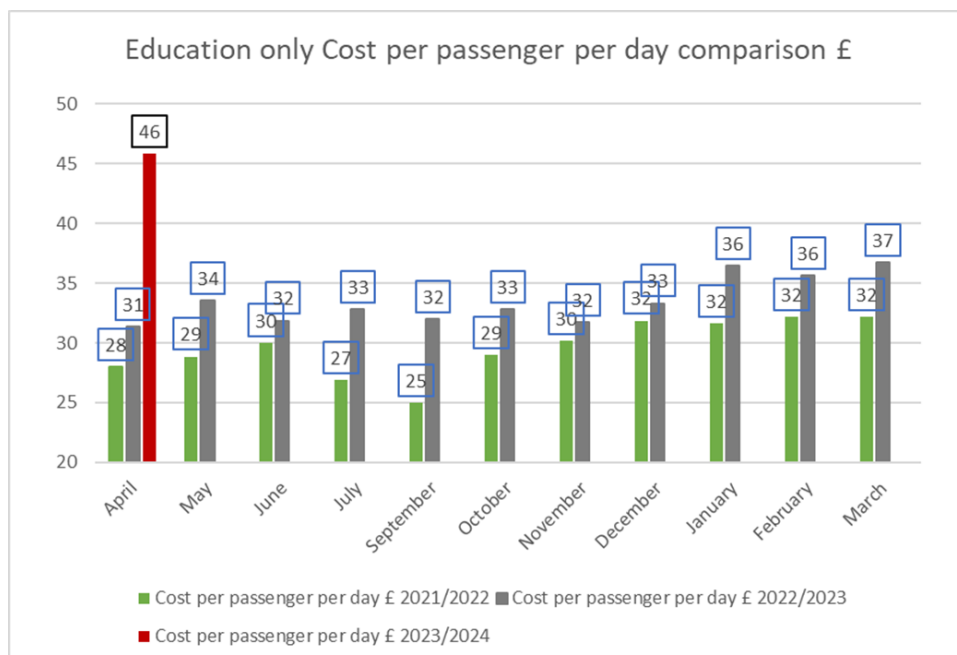
2.4 National and Local Challenges – Home to School Travel

National picture shows that all local authorities are experiencing increase in demands and significant increase in market costs per passenger per day. Over 1.5 million school age children in England have special educational needs, a 5.8% increase from last year. Furthermore, the number of pupils with Education Health Care Plans has increased from 4.0% in 2022 to 4.3%. This increase in numbers has significantly impacted the demands for Home to School Travel. The impact of COVID-19 has resulted in less availability of drivers and the recent cost of living crisis has increased fuel prices significantly. Significant increase in market costs per passenger per day in and out of areas.

Bristol’s Home to School travel mainly consists of providing single occupancy, or shared taxis. It is believed that this could be a barrier for some young people who may otherwise be able to access a wide range of opportunities available to support them on their journey into adulthood, employment and beyond. For some young people and their families, the personal gains of being able to access a high-quality independent travel training service can be enormous.

Lack of school capacity within Bristol is increasing the number of routes outside of those areas, thereby increasing the Home to School Travel costs significantly. There has been an increase in routes from April 22 to April 23 of 128% but is actually similar number of routes: 63 rising to 66. The costs are very much annualised and subject to the variations in term activity. So a rise from April to June is very usual, less activity July and none in August. Costs rise again Sept, Oct, Nov.

The graph below shows the significant increase in market costs per passenger per day from April 22 to April 23 – all passengers in and out of area. Although this appears to be relating to market rates, further analysis seems to suggest that distance, or greater mileage accounts for this increase rate per passenger.



3. Policy

- 3.1 Theme 1: of the Corporate Strategy 2022-27 is Children and Young People with the top-level aim of achieving “a city where every child belongs and every child gets the best start in life, whatever circumstances they were born in to”. Our Families Programme seeks to deliver against the following priorities in the theme:
- Child friendly city - Children and young people are supported by the city, their community, and the council to have the best possible start in life. They can reach their full potential and are kept safe from and supported to overcome violence, abuse, and other adverse childhood experiences, whatever the circumstances of their birth.
 - Supported to thrive - Children and young people are supported by the city, their community, and the council to have the best possible start in life. They can reach their full potential and are kept safe from and supported to overcome violence, abuse, and other adverse childhood experiences, whatever the circumstances of their birth.
 - Intergenerational equality - Lead city-wide approaches to tackling the root causes of structural inequality, breaking cycles of disadvantage, poverty, and trauma across generations to improve health and life opportunities.
- 3.2 This is supported by the Belonging Strategy. The over-arching vision of the strategy is supported by four pillars which will deliver on the intentions of the Bristol One City Plan, the Bristol Corporate Parenting Strategy, the Bristol Children’s Charter and the Bristol Equality Charter.
- 3.3 The programme contributes to the Health and Wellbeing Strategy working with communities, children and families, schools, early years which in turn impacts on demand management. Furthermore, the programme contributes to the ILACS improvement action plan.

4. Consultation

a)Internal

CLlr Asher Craig, Portfolio Holder for Children, Education & Equalities

Corporate Leadership Board

Delivery Executive

Our Families Programme Board

Mayor’s Strategic Board

Cabinet Board

Finance Task Group

Consultation with staff will take place during Autumn 23 as part of the changes to the operating model.

b)External

Mandate of programme approved at Cabinet 5th September 23 [Finance Exception Report](#).

Savings formed part of the budget process for 23/24 Full Council 21st February 23 [Budget 23/24](#)

Key policy changes due to take place 23/24 as part of the programme: Short Breaks, Home to School Travel (HTST) and High Needs Block Top Up Funding being consulted externally between September and December 23.

Parents/Carers forum invited to workshops as part of the redesign work for HTST.

5. Public Sector Equality Duties

- 5a) Before making a decision, section 149 Equality Act 2010 requires that each decision-maker considers the need to promote equality for persons with the following “protected characteristics”: age, disability, gender reassignment, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation. Each decision-maker must, therefore, have due regard to the need to:
- i) Eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct prohibited under the Equality Act 2010.
 - ii) Advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to --
 - remove or minimise disadvantage suffered by persons who share a relevant protected characteristic;
 - take steps to meet the needs of persons who share a relevant protected characteristic that are different from the needs of people who do not share it (in relation to disabled people, this includes, in particular, steps to take account of disabled persons' disabilities);
 - encourage persons who share a protected characteristic to participate in public life or in any other activity in which participation by such persons is disproportionately low.
 - iii) Foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and those who do not share it. This involves having due regard, in particular, to the need to –
 - tackle prejudice; and
 - promote understanding.
- 5b) [Equality Impact Assessments](#) completed for all validated savings within the programme as part of the 23/24 budget process. Equality Impact Assessment approved at Full Council 21st February 23. Any new proposed savings will have an Equality Impact Assessment.

Appendices:

Appendix A – Our Families Programme Governance and Context

Appendix B – Key Cost Drivers, Trends, Performance Data and Recovery Plans

LOCAL GOVERNMENT (ACCESS TO INFORMATION) ACT 1985

Background Papers:

Non applicable