



NOTICE OF MEETING

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

THURSDAY, 20 JULY 2023 AT 5.00 PM

COUNCIL CHAMBER - THE GUILDHALL, PORTSMOUTH

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If any member of the public wishing to attend the meeting has access requirements, please notify the contact named above.

CABINET MEMBER FOR CHILDREN, FAMILIES AND EDUCATION

Councillor Suzy Horton (Liberal Democrat)

Group Spokespersons

Councillor Ryan Brent, Conservative

Councillor Chris Dike, Portsmouth Independents Party

Councillor George Fielding, Labour

(NB This Agenda should be retained for future reference with the minutes of this meeting.)

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Deputations by members of the public may be made on any item where a decision is going to be taken. The request should be made in writing to the contact officer (above) by 12 noon of the working day before the meeting and must include the purpose of the deputation (for example, for or against the recommendations). Email requests are accepted.

AGENDA

- 1 Apologies**
- 2 Declarations of Members' Interests**
- 3 Inspection of Portsmouth City Council Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) (Pages 5 - 22)**
Purpose

This information report is to update Members on the outcome of the Ofsted ILACS inspection undertaken between 15 and 19 May 2023.

4 Six monthly Adoption Agency Activity Report March 2022 - September 2022 (Pages 23 - 34)

Purpose

1. This report will update the Lead Member, and the Cabinet on the activity of the Portsmouth Adoption Service for the period from 1 April 2022 to 30 September 2022, as required by the Adoption regulations.
2. The Portsmouth Adoption Service is provided directly by the Adoption Team within the Council. The team is responsible for the work with children who have a plan of adoption and works with Adopt South our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) who find, assess, and support adopters.
3. This report will describe the work of the in-house adoption team and the RAA and provide data of the outcomes achieved in the 6-month period.
4. Lastly it will provide an update on the priorities set out in the last reporting year and an update in any changes and or additions the coming year.

5 The Mockingbird Project (Pages 35 - 40)

Purpose

To provide an outline of The Mockingbird Project within the Portsmouth Fostering Service and to show the difference this continues to make to children we care for, and to the support our carers receive. The growth of this over recent years has been a significant achievement and the continuation of this is a priority for the service.

6 Private Fostering Annual Report 2022-2023 (Pages 41 - 58)

Purpose

The purpose of this report is to highlight the responsibilities that Portsmouth City Council has in relation to Private Fostering. It will look at the current numbers of children and young people in a Private Fostering arrangement and will analyse the issues that are relevant to the children and young people of Portsmouth. It will also look at evaluating the outcomes of Portsmouth City Council's work in relation to Private Fostering.

7 Local Authority Maintained School Balances at 31 March 2023 (Pages 59 - 70)

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet Member of the level of Local Authority maintained schools' revenue and capital balances as at 31 March 2023.

Members of the public are permitted to use both audio visual recording devices and social media during this meeting, on the understanding that it neither disrupts the meeting nor records those stating explicitly that they do not wish to be recorded. Guidance on the use of devices at meetings open to the public is available on the Council's website and posters on the wall of the meeting's venue.

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Agenda Item 3



THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY

(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Children, Families & Education Decision Meeting
Subject:	Inspection of Portsmouth City Council Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS)
Date of meeting:	20 July 2023
Report by:	Sarah Daly (Director Children, Families and Education)
Wards affected:	All

1. Requested by

1.1 For Members to receive the Ofsted inspection report.

2. Purpose

2.1 This report is to update Members on the outcome of the Ofsted ILACS inspection undertaken between 15 and 19 May 2023.

3. Background

3.1 The ILACS inspections by Ofsted focus on the effectiveness of local authority children's services and arrangements in the following areas:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection
- The experience and progress of children in care
- The experience and progress of care leavers
- Overall effectiveness

3.2 Portsmouth's children's services were last inspected in October 2018, when they were judged to be 'Good'. We were notified of the ILAC inspection on 5 May and the off-site week commenced at this time. During this week we uploaded over 200 documents (including a self assessment of the service), submitted a significant amount of child level data, produced audit reports of case work and inspector interviews commenced. The onsite week commenced on 15 May and completed on 19 May. During that period of time there were up to 6 Ofsted inspectors in the service. The inspectors came and sat alongside practitioners

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and reviewed their children's records with them, they met with children and families and spoke with key partner agencies.

3.3 The outcome judgements from the inspection are as follows:

- The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families - **Good**
- The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection - **Outstanding**
- The experiences and progress of children in care - **Good**
- The experiences and progress of care leavers - **Requires Improvement to be Good**
- Overall effectiveness - **Good**

3.4 In summary the report states that most children in Portsmouth receive a good service, and for some, it is outstanding. Services for care-experienced young people are less well developed. Leaders and managers are committed to the ongoing improvement of services for children and families. They have worked with partner agencies to deliver transformation, particularly within the early help and family safeguarding teams, which stand out as areas of strong practice, delivering excellent experiences and progress for children.

3.5 The experiences and progress of care leavers was identified as an area that needs improvement to be good. Ofsted found that many care-experienced young people do make good progress in many aspects of their lives and receive high-quality support from committed and caring personal advisers, but that services for care-experienced young people are less well developed than in other areas of children's services.

3.6 However, the report reflects that the council is committed to the ongoing improvement of services for children and families and that we have a clearly defined improvement plan in place. As a directorate, we are already working hard to address areas identified as needing improvement, so that we can meet the same the high standards achieved across Portsmouth's children's services.

3.7 Please see attached the full Ofsted report which was published on 3 July 2023.

Signed by Sarah Daly, Director, Children, Families and Education.



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Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

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Inspection of Portsmouth City Council local authority children's services

Inspection dates: 15 to 19 May 2023

Lead inspector: Christine Kennet, His Majesty's Inspector

Judgement	Grade
The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families	Good
The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection	Outstanding
The experiences and progress of children in care	Good
The experiences and progress of care leavers	Requires improvement to be good
Overall effectiveness	Good

Most children in Portsmouth receive a good service, and for some, it is outstanding. Services for care-experienced young people are less well developed. Leaders and managers are committed to the ongoing improvement of services for children and families. They have worked with partner agencies to deliver transformation, particularly within the early help and family safeguarding teams, which stand out as areas of strong practice, delivering excellent experiences and progress for children.

Leaders have created an environment that supports the chosen model of practice and prioritises children's wide-ranging needs. Leaders work effectively with partners to respond to children's well-being needs. As a result, leaders have been able to expand opportunities through joint commissioning to provide integrated care services. This is making a difference to children's lives and reducing their need for statutory services.

Children benefit from an improved early help offer, delivered by skilled and experienced practitioners. The family safeguarding and support teams now provide an integrated, whole-family approach; adult care social workers work alongside children's social workers to support the whole family to reduce risks and promote change. Services are family-focused, but a child-centred approach has been

maintained. Disabled children and children with complex needs receive an improved service from specialist workers who are based within the family safeguarding and support service.

When children need to come into care, most benefit from effective foster carers and stable homes. A new model of foster care has been introduced, with foster carers working in groups. This model helps to support children's complex needs and has resulted in improvements to the stability of long-term placements. Children's care plans have improved, helping workers to identify and address needs quickly. A specialist team provides unaccompanied asylum-seeking children with a consistent approach, supporting them to settle and to feel welcome on arrival.

Although no services have deteriorated, services for care-experienced young people have improved too slowly. Leaders are aware of this and have begun to address this area of practice. In addition, improvements are needed to ensure proportionality when dispensing with parental consent and in the recording of daily logs by foster carers regarding children in their care.

What needs to improve?

- The quality of services for care-experienced young people, in particular, access to health histories, education, employment and training and broader housing options.
- The recording of the rationale for decision-making when dispensing with parental consent.
- Foster carers capturing children's experiences and critical incidents so that the records are available for reference and for the children in later life.

The experiences and progress of children who need help and protection: outstanding

1. Impressive early help services are a strength and have improved since the last inspection in 2018. Well-designed and resourced integrated support services are commissioned to deliver an excellent range of services and interventions through five family hubs across the city. Children, including those with complex needs, receive highly skilled and specialist help from an extensive early help matrix of services. Assessments are comprehensive, informative and timely and draw on a range of views provided by relevant professionals. Plans are well devised and regularly reviewed. Interventions are trauma-informed, restorative, multidisciplinary and systemic. Children's circumstances are improved, and parents and carers empowered and enabled to parent with more confidence. Families co-produce family plans with interventions designed to meet their needs and those of their children. A team around the worker model supports one professional to be involved in children's lives, while maintaining contact with other relevant professionals. Targeted support in early help is reducing the need for interventions at a higher level. Although the family plan is still embedding, there is already a reduction in referrals, including repeat referrals, and children are able

to receive the right level of support in the right part of the service to meet their needs.

2. Thresholds are clearly understood, and most children and families receive timely and effective support. Children requiring a statutory service are promptly referred to the multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH). Decision-making in the MASH is proportionate and consistent with the presenting level of need and risk. Management oversight is timely and risk-assessed, and a lead professional is identified promptly. Responses are made to referrers once an outcome has been determined, ensuring that they understand what will happen next. This is an improvement since the last inspection.
3. Consistently strong partnership working in the MASH, including the police, health and early help services, is established and works well. Police and youth offending services support MASH decision-making and consider the risk of offending and how to support and divert children who may be vulnerable to exploitation. Partners are present at multi-agency risk assessment meetings for domestic abuse/violence and missing, exploited and trafficked strategy meetings as well as daily police management meetings to share wider information. For a small number of children, when decisions are made to dispense with parental consent, this is not always proportionate to the presenting risks and the rationale is not clearly recorded. Children do not experience delay when transferring from the MASH to the family safeguarding service, which enables them to receive a timely, effective and proportionate response.
4. The out-of-hours service, provided in collaboration with a neighbouring authority, responds promptly to urgent issues, visits families when required and is child-focused. The service ensures that urgent safeguarding matters are dealt with and that risks to children are well managed. There is effective handover between the out-of-hours service and the MASH, where work is picked up quickly and progressed. Strategy meetings held out of hours are well recorded and information is provided swiftly to daytime staff.
5. Skilled, joined-up work, delivered through the local authority's preferred model of practice and involving workers for adults and children, is improving the experiences and progress of children. Consistently strong assessments are timely, comprehensive and child-focused. Children are visited quickly and are seen alone. Creative and purposeful direct work is undertaken, which helps children to build trusted relationships and to share their feelings openly to inform assessment outcomes and decisions about next steps. Assessments demonstrate professional curiosity and a thorough analysis of risks and strengths, as well as an understanding of the impact of parental issues on children's progress. Risk of harm is identified by workers and effective action is taken to protect children when risks increase. Workers understand the cumulative impact of long-term neglect and trauma on children's progress and link children with services that can provide emotional support. Families receive well-coordinated support and advice to address often entrenched issues of domestic abuse, alcohol abuse and mental

health problems. Parents are helped effectively to tackle the challenges that they face. In many cases, the support and intervention that families receive result in sustained improvement and enable children to remain in the care of their parents, if it is safe to do so.

6. Timely strategy meetings are held in response to escalating or emerging risks and are well attended by partner agencies. Child protection and child-in-need plans are clear and focus on critical issues affecting children's lives. Plans are well written, multi-agency and are routinely reviewed. Parents and professionals attend reviews and core groups and are actively involved in creating plans for their children. Practitioners and managers take the necessary action if children's circumstances do not improve as a result of the support they are receiving. Child protection enquiries are thorough and analytical and lead to timely actions to reduce risks to children. Initial and review child protection conferences are well attended, and timely and clear records provide evidence of the decisions that are made.
7. Disabled children benefit from comprehensive and detailed assessments undertaken by specialist practitioners within the family safeguarding service. If children are unable to communicate verbally, social workers take additional time to get to know them, to understand their relationships, wishes and feelings. Disabled children's needs are robustly assessed and understood, to inform early transition plans.
8. When children's experiences are not improving, there is appropriate escalation to legal gateway meetings. Once in pre-proceedings, help, support and planning are effective. This results in most children's lives improving, and they are able to remain living safely with their families. Some pre-proceedings letters are not individualised to the parent concerned and language is not always sensitively considered. Leaders are aware of this and are making changes accordingly.
9. Risks in relation to children going missing and being exploited are identified well and, for most children, risks are reducing. Specialist workers undertake bespoke direct work and support children who go missing and/or are at risk of exploitation. The level of risk is assessed and monitored at multi-agency meetings to ensure that robust safety plans are in place to reduce risk.
10. Senior leaders have a sound oversight of children missing education and of those who are electively home educated. These children are monitored regularly, and appropriate action is taken to safeguard children if needed.

The experiences and progress of children in care: good

11. Children enter care appropriately and when it is in their best interests. This includes children recently admitted and those who have been in care for some time. Decisions are proportionate to children's needs and risks and are overseen

by senior managers. Care proceedings work is completed promptly and to a high standard, preventing delay for children.

12. Children receive bespoke care planning when they enter care, ensuring that their needs are understood and met. Planning starts early and is carefully phased, ensuring that children experience a smooth transition into adult social care services if necessary.
13. Careful and thorough assessments and plans underpin well-balanced decisions for the growing number of children who are returning home from care. The preferred model of practice is being introduced into 'going home' work, with adult workers supporting parents to address issues that have a negative impact on their parenting.
14. Updated annual assessments ensure that most children's emerging and changing needs are understood and considered in their reviews and care plans.
15. Children are helped to keep in touch with family members. Arrangements are made in the best interests of children and are reviewed when necessary.
16. Care plans comprehensively identify and address children's needs. Most children either attend or actively participate in their reviews and their views are highlighted in their plans. Many children are supported through easy access to advocacy and independent visitors. Children's plans are diligently reviewed by their independent reviewing officers (IROs), who write sensitive, short and informative letters to them to explain decisions. IROs' oversight and influence on children's lives between their formal statutory reviews are variable and evidence of their challenge and curiosity is limited.
17. Most children live with long-term foster carers in or close to Portsmouth. They receive secure, loving care through to adulthood. A small number of children, who have come into care more recently, have experienced several moves as a result of unsuccessful placement matching. The effectiveness of children's permanence planning is routinely interrogated by senior managers at quarterly quality assurance outcome meetings. A small number of children's care plans and records do not identify emerging permanence plans with sufficient clarity at children's second looked after reviews.
18. Meetings are held when difficulties arise between children and their carers. This supports carers to cope with children's complexities and challenges. Regular network meetings are held concerning some children. These meetings alert teams around the children to emerging difficulties at early stages and provide the opportunity to stabilise their living arrangements.
19. Children in care are visited regularly by social workers, who develop a good understanding of their wishes and feelings. This is achieved through engaging and thoughtful direct work, some of which is therapeutic and trauma-informed.

Most of this work is well documented in lively and personal records written to children, which document what happened and why decisions were taken.

20. Senior leaders have good oversight of the circumstances of the very small number of children living in unregistered settings; these settings are monitored regularly. Leaders have recently decided that a member of their team will visit each child living in an unregistered home, to provide an additional layer of assurance.
21. Children's health is reviewed annually, and most initial health assessments are completed promptly after they come into care. Physical health needs are addressed, and children's emotional needs are met in a variety of ways, congruent with their individual needs, wishes and personalities. This nuanced, bespoke approach helps many children to improve their mental and emotional health. A dedicated child and adolescent mental health service for children in care provides important advice and offers consultations to social workers and carers, alongside some direct work with children.
22. When children go missing from care and are at risk of exploitation, risks are comprehensively assessed through regular strategy meetings, child exploitation risk assessments and multi-agency meetings and reviews. Disruption tools, such as child abduction warning notices, are sometimes deployed. Not all of this work is uploaded to children's records. For some children, it is difficult to track the impact of some of these measures in subsequently reducing risks to children and diverting them from exploitation. Some return home conversations are not held promptly enough or routinely uploaded to children's records. Most interviews are timely but some lack depth and detail. It is not always clear how they inform plans and reduce risks to children. These issues have already been identified by senior leaders as areas for improvement and plans are in place to tackle weaknesses and monitor progress.
23. A recently established specialist team provides a rapid and effective response to newly arrived unaccompanied asylum-seeking children. Their sometimes arduous and traumatic journeys are well understood, as well as the dangers they may have encountered in their countries of origin. Suitable and well-matched placements are obtained for most children, often reflecting their cultural heritage and preferences. Most live with foster parents who provide warm, nurturing family settings. Placing children in semi-independent or independent placements is avoided whenever possible. Health assessments, and support for children in lodging their asylum applications, are offered promptly.
24. Aspirations for children in care are high. The virtual school provides useful and effective help for children, their families and the professionals who support them. As a result, children who come into care attend school more regularly, learn better and improve their behaviours. Nevertheless, virtual school leaders recognise where there is more to do and go about their work with tenacity and determination.

25. The sufficiency of foster carers has improved. The ongoing development of foster carers working in supportive units is a strength of the service. It is a key initiative in supporting fostering households, and an incentive in carer recruitment. The majority of carers feel supported by their workers. However, training is not so accessible for foster carers in other employment, and the route for progression to become a 'career grade' foster carer is not always clear. This is an area that is currently being reviewed. Most foster carers are not recording daily logs regarding children in their care, so there is no clear record of children's progress or critical incidents. The panel chair is positive about the quality of assessments, which are presented on time.
26. There are close links between the council and the regional adoption agency, Adopt South, and they work well together to promote the needs of children. Adoption social workers know their families well. This is reflected in their presentations to panel and the good quality of their reports. Thorough matching reflects children's needs and considers how adopters will address them. The sufficiency of adopters who can meet children's needs has been strengthened since Portsmouth joined Adopt South, and permanence is achieved earlier for many children.

The experiences and progress of care leavers: requires improvement to be good

27. The pace of change and progress for care leavers has been too slow. Although the care leaver offer is currently under review, the ambition across the council and with partners to achieve more as corporate parents for care leavers is too limited.
28. There is a clearly defined service improvement plan and managers do know their services well. However, several of the current areas for service development were identified at the time of the last inspection in 2018 in respect of care leavers' health histories, education, employment and training, and accommodation options. While many care-experienced young people do make good progress in many aspects of their lives and receive high-quality support from committed and caring personal advisers, too many are still not achieving consistently good enough outcomes.
29. There is an active and expanding participation offer in the council and care-experienced young people are regularly involved in participation and consultation events. These are used well to help inform service development plans. Care-experienced young people also help with staff interviews and training, and some have attended the corporate parenting board to share their views. Six-weekly 'connect' activity sessions are held to encourage more care leavers to get involved to help shape the support and services available. Leaders are currently updating the offer in consultation with care-experienced young people.

30. The current care leaver offer sets out the practical and financial support and entitlements available, and helpfully signposts care-experienced young people to relevant support and services. Financial entitlements are being updated. However, discretionary payments are not clearly defined to help care leavers to understand what they can request help with, and essentials, such as access to Wi-Fi and driving lessons, are not included. Some care-experienced young people are already benefiting from the new financial offer, including the introduction of a council tax exemption, but this exemption is not an inclusive offer and only applies to those care leavers living within the local authority.
31. The offer for care-experienced young people who are young parents is underdeveloped and not all care-experienced young people spoken to were aware of their full entitlements. Although care-experienced young people have access to the family hubs, they do not have their own space to meet, such as a community space, when they need immediate help with practical aspects such as showering, cooking, laundry facilities, food items or simply need advice and guidance.
32. Most care-experienced young people are supported well by committed and caring personal advisers, up to the age of 25 years. Personal advisers are allocated to children in care at the age of 16/17 years and are able to build meaningful relationships before becoming their key workers at 18 years. Despite regular visits and attempts at keeping in touch, contact is lost with too many care-experienced young people.
33. Personal advisers are passionate about the support they provide and are rightly proud to celebrate the achievements of care-experienced young people. They are strong advocates who provide appropriate challenge to get the right type of help and services that care-experienced young people need.
34. Most care-experienced young people participate in some way in their pathway plans, which focus on the important aspects of their lives. The quality of plans is variable, but most identify needs well, they are reviewed regularly and updated when situations change. Care-experienced young people are supported to maintain and re-establish important relationships with family and friends, including brothers and sisters. Many are helped to gain the practical skills they need to live safely and successfully as young adults and have most of the important documentation they need for independent living.
35. Most care-experienced young people live in suitable accommodation which is safe and meets their needs. However, a small but significant number of care-experienced young people live in unsuitable accommodation. Personal advisers recognise the importance of safe, secure and suitable housing and are determined in their efforts to try to achieve better accommodation for all. The strategic approach to homelessness does not yet safeguard care-experienced young people from being found intentionally homeless or being housed in bed and breakfast accommodation. Despite a weekly housing panel, this has not achieved change for a small number of young people.

36. Care-experienced young people in custody receive a good level of support and are regularly visited by their personal advisers. They receive some financial assistance and the majority benefit from planned accommodation to help to provide the certainty they need to restart their lives within the community.
37. Care-experienced young people who are or were seeking asylum receive good support to help them prepare and adjust to living in their communities. They are supported in all aspects of their development, and they also have support to trace and contact family members and, where possible, to be reunited with their families.
38. Progress has been too slow in ensuring that robust systems are in place to provide care-experienced young people with information about their childhood health histories. Personal advisers are unable to identify which care leavers have access to this important and essential information; this issue was highlighted in the 2018 inspection. Current health needs are met and care leavers who need support with their emotional well-being and mental health can access a bespoke well-being health offer. Personal advisers advocate for and support care leavers to access appropriate adult mental health services and advocate for a small number of young people whose health impacts on their capacity to access help.
39. Personal advisers understand risk and vulnerabilities for care-experienced young people and take appropriate actions to help safeguard them. A new transitional safeguarding panel is bringing multi-agency partners together to manage risk as a collective and to help identify the right support to meet their needs. However, it is too early to assess the impact of this service. Some personal advisers also make good use of risk assessments to inform interventions and support to a small number of care-experienced young people who are vulnerable to criminal exploitation or who present a risk to other members of the community. However, risk is not always explicitly considered, for example for care-experienced young people who are living in bed and breakfast accommodation.
40. The number of care-experienced young people in education, employment or training is too low. This was identified in the 2018 inspection and remains a concern. While many care-experienced young people are supported in their ambitions and helped to engage in education, employment and training, this has not led to tangible improvements. Leaders have plans to develop an employment academy and create more employment and apprenticeship opportunities, but these are not yet in place. Care-experienced young people told inspectors that they want more opportunities. For example, there is currently only one apprenticeship available for care-experienced young people within the council. Many care-experienced young people applied for this role, showing the level of interest in such opportunities.

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families: good

41. The stability of the senior leadership team and a determination to get things right for children have underpinned the ongoing progress. Senior leaders know themselves well and understand their strengths and the areas that need improving.
42. Children and family services benefit from strong cross-party political support. This has resulted in major investment to implement the chosen model of social care practice and the development of the foster carer groups to support children in care. These initiatives have both significantly improved services for children and families. Senior leaders began to implement this transformation at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. The pandemic has led to delays in implementing this approach in children in care services, where work is now beginning as part of the 'Going Home' project.
43. The chief executive, lead member and the senior leadership team champion children, families and young people's needs and educate the wider council to raise awareness of their corporate parenting responsibilities through training and induction. There is more work to be done to create and implement a 'one council approach', particularly in response to the needs of care-experienced young people.
44. Partnership working has been strengthened, particularly with health, which has enabled leaders to expand opportunities for health and social care, such as the health offer within the family hubs in early help and direct adult services work and involvement within the family safeguarding teams.
45. The chief executive and the lead member for children's services are well informed about the work of children's services and the safeguarding partnership and are keen to understand the impact of their decision-making on practice. This has led, for example, to the lead member for children's services spending time with foster carers, the children in care council, social work teams and the youth cabinet to seek their views. As a result of the findings from these meetings, leaders supported young people to set up a mental health conference, where young people could ask questions and scrutinise decision-making.
46. Supporting children and young people to reach their potential in education and employment has been an area of focus for leaders and managers. Ongoing work by the virtual school to reduce the non-attendance and exclusion rates for children in care has led to these figures slowly reducing. The proportion of care-experienced young people who are in education, employment and training is lower than in other similar authorities, and leaders have plans to address this. However, despite a strong sense of aspiration, this is not reflected in outcomes. There are plans to expand opportunities in September via in-house internships, traineeships, and the launch of an academy. Partnership working with schools is

strong, continuing the links set up during the pandemic; these have strengthened further and have supported positive relationships, benefiting children and their families.

47. Early help services are a strength. Targeted support in early help services reduces escalation to statutory services. The early help offer, supported by qualified social workers, has provided a strong and accessible service to significantly improve the lives of children, young people and their families.
48. Leaders have increased in-house fostering provision and are continuing to expand their foster care model. Long-term placement stability rates are a strength. Portsmouth has two children's homes, both homes being recently inspected with positive outcomes. The regulatory team praised the interventions for children living in these homes, which are improving their experiences and progress significantly. However, not all care-experienced young people have access to a range of accommodation suitable to meet their needs.
49. Children's participation is actively encouraged and promoted. Numerous forums and initiatives seek children's views and involve them in issues that matter to them. The children in care council and care-experienced forum are dynamic, inclusive bodies and are highly influential. Senior leaders are well sighted on topics raised by children and care-experienced young people through an effective corporate parenting board and other ways of receiving feedback. Children told inspectors very convincingly that more decisive responses could be made to tackle some of their more pressing, recurrent concerns, such as being visited at their schools in school time, and dissatisfaction that their social workers leave without planned introductions and handovers to their successors.
50. Portsmouth's leaders are ambitious for their workforce to be trained and effective practitioners. The chosen model of practice has become strongly embedded in the work with children and families and workers have been trained and supported in this approach. The multidisciplinary model has improved outcomes for children and reduced harm, and feedback from families to inspectors was overwhelmingly positive.
51. Portsmouth has a robust performance management framework, giving managers a range of systems to monitor practice across services. Leaders know themselves well and their self-evaluation of practice is robust. Some weaknesses remain within the services for care-experienced young people, although the core practice and commitment of the personal advisers are strong. Improvements to services for these care-experienced young people are dependent on the whole council working together to fulfil their responsibilities as corporate parents.
52. Historically, Portsmouth children's services have experienced stability in the workforce. However, over the past year, leaders have begun to experience the challenges in recruiting and retaining qualified and experienced staff which are also seen nationally. In response to recruitment challenges, leaders have

increased the well-being, training and support offer within the workforce. The principal social worker is looking at developing other potential career progressions, such as advanced practitioner roles and wider training opportunities.

53. Social workers talk positively about working in Portsmouth and inspectors consistently heard about their loyalty and commitment to the service. Agency staff feel valued and supported, and they have accessible training. Newly qualified workers are choosing to stay and work in Portsmouth and all workers feel supported by frontline practice managers. Portsmouth is a centre for learning and practitioners benefit from a comprehensive workforce development offer, including the Portsmouth Stronger Futures Academy, for the assessed and supported year in employment (ASYE), and a newly developed second year in practice programme for post-ASYE social workers to support the implementation of the Portsmouth model of family practice.

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THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY. (Please note that 'Information Only' reports do not require Equality Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance comments as no decision is being taken.)

Title of meeting: Cabinet member for Children Families and Education

Subject: Six monthly Adoption Agency Activity Report March 2022 - September 2022

Date of meeting: 20 July 2023

Report by: Michelle Sanders Interim Head of Service for Children we Care For

Wards affected: ALL

1. Requested by:

1.1. It is required by Standard 25.6 of the Adoption National Minimum Standards 2011 for Local Authority Adoption Services that the executive receives a six-monthly written report outlining the management and performance of the adoption agency which have been provided. This report provides the summary information for the six-month period of 1st April 2022 to 30th September 2022.

2. Purpose

2.1. This report will update the Lead Member, and the Cabinet on the activity of the Portsmouth Adoption Service for the period from 1 April 2022 to 30th September 2022, as required by the Adoption regulations.

2.2. The Portsmouth Adoption Service is provided directly by the Adoption Team within the Council. The team is responsible for the work with children who have a plan of adoption and works with Adopt South our Regional Adoption Agency (RAA) who find, assess, and support adopters.

2.3. This report will describe the work of the in-house adoption team and the RAA and provide data of the outcomes achieved in the 6-month period

2.4. Lastly it will provide an update on the priorities set out in the last reporting year and an update in any changes and or additions the coming year.

3. Background

3.1. In 2016 Authorised Authorities and Voluntary Adoption Agencies joined together to form Regional Adoption Agencies (RAAs). As a result, Hampshire County Council (HCC), Isle of Wight Council (IOW), Portsmouth City Council (PCC) and Southampton City Council (SCC) Adoption Services came together, along with the voluntary adoption agencies Barnardo's and Parents and Children Together (PACT) to establish the Adopt South Regional Adoption Agency (RAA). Adopt South went live on 1 April 2019.

4. Portsmouth Adoption Team

4.1 The Portsmouth Adoption Team take responsibility for children who have a plan for adoption until the point of the Adoption Order being made. The team undertakes the work that achieves that plan, prepares children for permanence, and concludes the legal requirements that changes a child's legal status to allow adoption to take place. The team comprises of three full time social workers, two part time social workers, a social work assistant and a team leader.

4.2 The social workers in the Adoption Team begin working with children who are identified as needing a parallel plan of adoption as one of the possible permanent outcomes.

4.3 A Parallel Plan ensures that a child who is unable to return to their birth parent(s) or wider family have an alternative permanence plan by means of adoption. This parallel plan avoids any delay in decision making and ensures we are considering both options alongside each other.

4.4 The Adoption Team, work with the allocated child's social worker to gather information about the child and their family. They are responsible for compiling all the relevant documentation which is used to complete a child's permanence report (CPR). This report forms part of the documentation provided to the Agency Decision Maker who is responsible for the consideration and potential agreement of an adoption plan. It must stand the test that nothing else, other than adoption, will reasonably do for a child.

4.5 The working relationship between the adoption social worker and child's social worker enables a smooth transition for the child, should they be made subject to a Care and Placement Order at a final court hearing. It is at this point that the adoption social worker becomes the allocated social worker. Family finding completed during the care proceedings enables a match to be made at the earliest opportunity. A linking meeting is held when a potential family has been identified for the child. The adoption social worker will then meet with the prospective adopters, and the adopter's social worker from Adopt South, and will begin the process of progressing to a linking Panel. Following a successful Linking Panel recommendation, the team begins the work of moving the child to live with their forever family. There is careful and considered work undertaken as to when and how introductions are made. The team work to support the child, their prospective adoptive family, and their birth family to the point of an Adoption Order being made. Life story work and memory boxes are prepared by the team during this period to support them in moving to their forever family and to support their identify in moving forwards.

4.6 Involvement of adopters in the recruitment, assessment, and approval of prospective adopters will continue to be expanded. It is evident that adopters telling their stories and their experiences provides prospective adopters with real life messages as to how they can embrace the adoption experience and support their child(ren) identity. Feedback is regularly sought from prospective adopters and adopters during the assessment and matching stages.

5. Adopt South

5.1 The key functions for Adopt South are the recruitment, assessment and support of prospective adoptive families, and the post adoption support services for adopted children and their families. The Adopt South Children's Family Finding team is directly linked to each local authority Children's Adoption Team to ensure suitable potential adoptive families are identified as soon as possible, promoting timely matching and placement for those children. Those children adopted, and their families have access to Adopt South's comprehensive post adoption support service.

5.2 Adopt South compares very well to the other 31 Regional Adoption Agencies. The timeliness of the work remains well within government expectations, enabling children to secure permanent families more quickly and all children during this reporting period being placed with in house adopters.

5.3 The close working relationship between Adopt South and the Children's Adoption Team allows for the early identification of additional support if required. It also allows for children to be placed locally to their area of birth if safe to do so.

5.4 Since the launch of Adopt South, 633 children have had families identified. 274 of these children have been children that have been assessed as harder to place. 386 children have been formally linked and 380 families approved.

5.5 During this reporting period families have been identified for 115 children, including matching for 51 children assessed as harder to place. Of these 115 children 66 were Hampshire children; 3 Isle of Wight; 30 Southampton children and 16 children from Portsmouth.

6. Adoption Activity

6.1. The adoption activity for the period of 2019- sept 2022 is detailed in appendix 1. The most recent data tells us;

- There were 18 children adopted in the year 2021/2022. There have been no children adopted during this reporting period which in part has been as a result of the Somerset judgement and some delays for children.
- Within this reporting period there were 16 children linked with prospective adopters.
- 5 children had placement orders granted.
- 3 children had plans of adoption agreed.
- 3 placements were made under fostering for adoption

7. For some young children unable to live with their birth family it is possible for them to be placed in Fostering for Adoption Placements (FfA). These are adoptive families who are also approved temporarily as foster carers for a specific child. Fostering for Adoption can

offer the best opportunity for the child if the court decides they need to be adopted as the child can be placed with an approved adoptive family whilst parents and wider family members are being considered. The child remains in one placement whilst decisions are being made rather than being placed with a foster family and then moved to an adoptive family should the court decide the child needs adoption. Appendix A tells us that there is a steady number of FfA with an average yearly number of 6 over the past three years. This compares well within the region having 13 foster for adopt placements in total.

8. In the year April 2021 to March 2022 there were 23 plans of adoption agreed. This first half of this year shows 3 children, which is a significant reduction in the number of children being considered by the agency decision maker. However, there are various other permanent options for children to provide them with secure and safe care for their minorities. This data may tell us that successful interventions with their family and their wider network have resulted in adoption not being necessary.

- 8.1. During this period, all children have been placed with Adopt South adoptive families which means those children remain placed within the geographical region and those families will already have knowledge of and access to the Adopt South support service. Therefore, adoptive parents are more likely to access early support to avoid any risk of adoption breakdown. Last year there were 4 children regionally placed outside of the region one being a Portsmouth child. The continued placement of children within the region has enabled Adopt South to remain well within budget for any interagency spend. In addition, there has been an income generated on other regional agencies using approved adopters from Adopt south and have met 72% of their yearly income target already.

9. Adopters' Journey

- 9.1 94 new households have been approved during the first half of 2022. Stage 1 of the process has a dedicated team and are the only RAA that has so. This early stage in the process of assessment has provided potential adopters with time to understand the needs of children being considered for adoption and the requirement of providing therapeutic parenting. The average length of this assessment stage in this reporting period is 1.6 months, remaining well in the government expectation of 2 months. The team continue to focus on applicants considering placements of siblings and older children and those with additional needs, giving greater scope for placements.

- 9.2 The overall timescales of the stage 2 assessment process were achieved in 3.6 months within this 6-month period, which is well within the government expectation of 4 months.

- 9.3 The ASGLB data shows that the RAA were the only adoption agency achieving both stages of the adopter journey within timescales.

- 9.4 Regarding the overall adoption journey of all four stages the average timescale for the first quarter of this reporting year was 5 months and for quarter 2 was 4.8 months, remaining well within the government expectation of 6 months.

- 9.5 This data tells us that there is a year-on-year improvement with the timeliness of assessing adopters and children being linked and placed with the average last year being 5.4 months and the previous year being 5.5

9.6 The ASGLB continues to show that Adopt South has the shortest adoption journey of all the 31 regional adoption agencies.

10. Childs Journey

10.1 The first half of this reporting year has seen an increase in the number of childrens plans across the region being considered by the agency decision maker. Across the region this has been 86 children in total. In Portsmouth this related to 3 children.

10.2 There have been 61 placement orders agreed across the region in this reporting period. Portsmouth had 5 children made subject of a placement order.

11. Adoption Support

11.1 Many children placed for adoption come from families with complex backgrounds where they have experienced trauma due to ongoing neglect, families experiencing domestic abuse and drug and alcohol abuse. The adoption support provided includes interventions such as family therapy, play therapy and birth parent counselling. Research tells us of the significant impact on a child's development of early childhood trauma and it is imperative that families can access support in a timely manner. This provides support as they progress through their minority and onto adulthood. Support can ensure an increased resilience for both the child and their adoptive parent(s) to enable children to adjust and repair from their early experiences. The adoption support service has recently been redesigned to create teams to focus on a specific part of the service and shows it is being continually reviewed and developed. The four teams are now:

- The Adopt South Family Hub
- The adopt south family support and assessment team
- The adopt south family connections team
- Adoption support for adults.

Information from the Adopt South Progress Summary Report attached highlights some examples of the support taken up:

- 279 new enquiries
- Positive take up of the consultation service with 12 out of the 18 being used in the first half year
- 48 families attended a family activity event to provide space to come together and build on their adoption support network
- 22 educational psychology consultations have taken place
- 260 children and parents attended the family fun day
- £613, 800 approved for families from the adoption support fund.
- 5,914 active exchanges with additional support to birth families and adoptive parents with 257 virtual appointment and 69 face to face.

12. Somerset- Judgment

12.1 In November 2021, Somerset County Council asked for legal advice about the Placement Orders for ten children (who had not yet been matched with adopters), where Adoption Agency Regulations had not been fully complied with. This was particularly in relation to the way children's health information was presented to the Court. There was subsequently a delay for children who were awaiting final orders

of adoption, whilst clarity was sought by Local Authorities in relation to the expectations of the Courts regarding Medical Advisors reports for Adoption. The President of the Family Division handed down the final judgement of the Somerset case in April 2022.

12.2 Portsmouth City Council, alongside the RAA, have planned to ensure compliance with the medical advice in line with this judgement. This requires an assurance of a comprehensive medical summary being included by the Medical Advisor in the paperwork presented to the Agency Decision Maker. During this period Adoption Orders and Placement Orders could not be granted whilst this legal issue regarding medical information was being resolved. However, they could be placed with prospective adopters under a Foster for Adopt arrangement. This prevented delay for some children in forming relationships with their adopters, which is a critical element of promoting early attachment. Whilst compliance with the medical advice has been progressed, this has impacted this reporting period with no children having an adoption order granted. Adoption Orders started to be granted in October 2022, with medical summaries in place, and we know 9 children have since been adopted between the second half of 2022/23. This is showing progress since this judgment has been made and children are progressing through the court process.

13. Regional picture

13.1 There continues to be a decline in the number of placement orders being granted and has not risen in line with the number of parallel plans in place and children plans being approved for adoption by the agency decision maker. COVID has impacted on the court and hearings being delayed holding bi-monthly hearings, alongside the impact of the Somerset judgment. However, the numbers of children formally linked has risen in the first half of this reporting year for children being adopted.

13.2 There have only been 2 disruptions pre-adoption order during this reporting period. There have been 11 since the launch of the RAA.

13.3 Learning events continue to take place with the RAA to ensure practitioners are aware of any changes needed in practice in moving forwards.

14. For local consideration

14.1 The number of children needing adoption has reduced and Portsmouth has seen a reduction in the number of children with a court agreed adoption plan (Placement Order), over the past 18 months reducing from 19 last year to 5 in this reporting period. In 2020/21 there were 16 children. Portsmouth Children's Social Care continues to maintain a parallel planning process which is tracked and monitored through the care proceedings tracker and Looked After Child reviews. This is telling us that work is completed in a timely manner for those children identified as needing to be considered for adoption and have a parallel plan in place. We also know permanence has many possible outcomes and can include placement with birth parents, special guardians, relatives, long-term fostering, in addition to adoption. What requires a review is the confidence that all children unable to return to their birth families have adoption considered as part of their permanence planning. Of the current 16 children who have families identified, 15 are under 2 years of age and one child is aged 2-5. There are no sibling groups identified with families. Regionally 44 children were between 2-5 years of age and 7 were over 5. 15 sibling groups

have families identified. We need to assure ourselves that we are ambitious for all our children including those harder to place children which includes older children, sibling groups and those assessed as having additional needs. The RAA have demonstrated in their regional data that these children can be afforded with a forever family, and it is imperative that these children have the opportunity of a focused period of time where this is explored for them as a parallel plan.

15. Areas of development

15.1 Adopt South continuously updates the recruitment strategy including developing prospective adoptive parents' knowledge, understanding and support to promote matching with the children with complex needs. This work is enabling the identification of prospective adopters and subsequent matching and there is one child currently in the city waiting for matching. Investment to regional adoption agencies will boost adoptive family recruitment, particularly for those children with complex needs and deemed harder to place i.e., older children, sibling groups and children of black, Asian and minority ethnic backgrounds.

15.2 In summary the strengths of Adopt South for Portsmouth:

- The recruitment pool is shared across all the four regions and there are less out of area adoptions having to be considered and purchased.
- As a RAA they have the lowest number of children waiting for adoptive families, having approved the 2nd highest number of adopters across all 31 RAAs.
- There is immediate access to a wider pool of adoptive families for Portsmouth children across the region.
- Adoptive placements are more localised within the regional area, promoting efficiency in adoption support, particularly specialist local service providers for adoption support.
- We are building on local authority good practice, knowledge, and expertise to enable prospective adopters to be fully prepared and suitably matched and supported with those children placed - securing that child's future throughout their childhood and beyond.
- Regionalising adoption support enables adoptive families being able to access robust comprehensive support packages to mitigate risk of disruption for children with complex needs.

16. Conclusion and plans for 2022/23

16.1 The Local authority and the RAA have continued to ensure that children identified as needing an adoptive family have been prioritised. There have been some challenging areas, and the key performance data shows a reduction in the number of children being adopted. Whilst this is a national and regional picture, Portsmouth is seeing a more significant decline.

16.2 The continued funding will support adoptive families to provide the care for children who have experienced trauma in their early childhood so that they can settle and benefit from adoption.

16.3 Additional funding will support the need for more adoptive families for children that are harder to place.

16.4 The priorities for the next year are as follows.



- Any potential delays within the court process need to be mitigated to ensure children are placed in a timely manner with their adoptive families. As a result of the pandemic, applications to the court are now heard on a "bulk" listed day rather than individually. We will ensure compliance with timely applications for the bulk listings, including compliance with the Somerset judgment.
- We will continue to identify children through the permanence process so that where the parallel plan is adoption, they can be placed with a family at the earliest point should this be the outcome of the court, alongside all necessary support that may be required. This includes reducing the time between placement order and matching.
- We will review our permanence planning process to ensure we are ambitious in our planning for all children unable to return to their birth families which will include children that are considered harder to place such as older children and those within sibling groups.
- Portsmouth will be actively involved in a new early permanence work stream being progressed by the RAA
- Ongoing training will be provided in conjunction with the RAA to ensure practitioners are updated about recent research and practice, including developing the skills to assess siblings staying together to apart as they move onto permanence.

Signed by (Director):

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
Adoption Activity 2019 - Sept 2022	End of document
Adoption Scorecard	End of document
Adopt South Progress Summary Report Data and Comparisons to projected targets Quarter 1 (April – June 2022)	 Adopt South - Progress Summary R
Adopt South Progress Summary Report Data and Comparisons to projected targets Quarter 2 (July – September 2022)	 Adopt South Year 4 - Q2 2022-23 Shorter

Appendix 1 Adoption activity April 2019 – Sept 2022

Year 1 April - 31 March	Adoption orders No. of children adopted	Children's plans for adoption agreed	Placement Orders granted	Children linked with adoptive family	Prospective adoptive families approved	FfA placements	Placements disrupted
2019/20	25	27	20	21	34 (Portsmouth number)	2	2
2020/21	18	16	16	19	117 (Adopt South)	5	0
2021/22	18	23	19	10	101	7	0
2022 / 23 (Q1 - 2) April - - September	0	3	5	16	41	3	0

Appendix 2 - Adoption Scorecards

- 1) Page 9 shows data extracted from the DfE Adoption; Special Guardianship Leadership Board Adoption Scorecards published 24/08/20. For full information please see link:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/adoption-scorecards

- 2) Government thresholds for children needing adoption timeliness

A1: 426 days - from date child enters care to moving in with adoptive family

A2: 121 days -from date the court agrees to local authority placing a child for adoption to the date the local authority agrees the match for the child with an adoptive family

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Government Adoption and Special Guardianship Leadership Board (ASGLB), figures for rolling year 2016-19 (published August 2020)

A1: National England average 433 days

A2: National England average 173 days

Portsmouth timescales for 2020 / 21

Scorecard 10 - 356 days

Scorecard 2 - 200 days

Scorecard 20 - 205 days

Timescales for April 2021 - March 2022

Scorecard figures for 2021 - 22

	Quarter 1 (April - June)	Quarter 2 (July - September)
Scorecard 10 A10 (average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family, adjusted for foster career adoptions, for children who have been adopted.)	198	249
Scorecard 2 A2 (Average time (in days) between Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family.)	112	170
Scorecard 20 A20 (Average time (in days) between Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family.) - 204	126	71
	Quarter 3 (October - December)	Quarter 4 (January - March)
Scorecard 10 A10 (average time (in days) between a child entering care and moving in with adoptive family, adjusted for foster career adoptions, for children who have been adopted.)	374	804
Scorecard 2 A2 (Average time (in days) between Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family.)	273	146
Scorecard 20 A20 (Average time (in days) between Local Authority receiving court authority to place a child and deciding on a match to an adoptive family.) - 204	177	620

Scorecard figures for April 2022 - September 22

These scorecards have not been triggered as there have been no adoption orders made in this period.

Agenda Item 5



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(Please note that "Information Only" reports do not require Integrated Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance Comments as no decision is being taken)

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education Decision meeting
Subject:	Mockingbird Update Report
Date of meeting:	20 July 2023
Report by:	Jackie Clark (Service Leader) and Vicky Laybourne (Team Leader)
Wards affected:	ALL

1. Requested by

This update report was presented to the Corporate Parenting Board on 28 June 2023. Further that, and in light of the significance of the project in Portsmouth in caring for our children, it is being presented to note.

2. Purpose

To provide an outline of The Mockingbird Project within the Portsmouth Fostering Service and to show the difference this continues to make to children we care for, and to the support our carers receive. The growth of this over recent years has been a significant achievement and the continuation of this is a priority for the service.

3. Background

Mockingbird is an innovative programme for delivering foster care which brings significant benefits to the lives of fostered children and those who look after them. Mockingbird uses an extended family model, in the form of 'constellations' which consist of a 'hub' home and several 'satellite' homes nearby. The specially recruited and trained hub home carers offer respite care, peer support, regular joint planning and social activities. Because of its structure, Mockingbird helps alleviate the sense of isolation foster carers can feel and offers immediate practical support - similar to that a non-fostering family might receive from friends and relatives. Continuity of care is one of Mockingbird's underpinning principles, so hub home carers ensure the routines of the children and young people are kept consistent, regardless of where they are staying.



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We first launched Mockingbird in Portsmouth in 2021 and since then the constellations have proved to be a positive addition to our Foster Carer support and wrap around support to the children we care for. It is a model based on strengthening relationships and has shown to improve placement stability and relationships with birth families.

Portsmouth remains the pioneers of the South Coast, with the successful development of 5 Mockingbird constellations across the city and beyond. We have launched 5 constellations since January 2021, these are comprised of 48 foster carers and 65 children.

- North constellation launched in January 2021
- Gosport and Fareham constellation launched in July 2021
- Central Portsmouth constellation launched in July 2021
- Havant and Waterlooville constellation launched in September 2022
- Southsea constellation launched in March 2023

4. Benefits of Mockingbird to Portsmouth, linking to our Corporate Parenting Strategy:

Strengthening Relationships

The model is providing an extended family to the children of the constellations. They are having the opportunity to make friends and connections with positive adults. Several of the children in the constellation struggle to build relationships and friendships with their peers but through Mockingbird they have been able to experience sleepovers and going for tea with a friend. The significance of these events cannot be underestimated! The children have met up at parks, play centres, Flip Out amongst other places for their social activities. They are enjoying being part of a community where they accepted. The Hub Carers have provided on average 4 sleepovers per week to the children of the constellations.

Positive family contact has taken place at the Hub homes whereas previously it had been at Battenburg Family Centre. The Hub Carers have facilitated family time in the Hub Home and in the community with multiple families. One of our Hub Carers has provided family time with a child, mother and sibling in the Hub home and has facilitated time for a grandmother to meet with her granddaughter in the community. Another Hub Carer has supported a family member care for her sister, and although this was not sustainable, she felt supported which ensured their relationship could be maintained.

The feedback from the families has been really positive and they are enjoying family time in a natural environment where the children are safe whilst having normalised family time together.



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Placement stability

Since the launch of all five of the constellations more children have the security and support of Mockingbird. Through offering emotional and practical support placements for children have stabilised. This is because the children are able to spend time with the Hub Carers, whom they have a relationship with. The Hub Carers are able to offer time and space for carers and children to reflect and start to rebuild and restore relationships. The Hub Carers have offered extended stays to children where relationships have broken down. The Hub Carers offer consistency of care to these children, and whilst the aim is always to rebuild the relationship if this isn't an option the children are looked to be matched with other satellite carers within the same constellation or a carer is joined to ensure the children have the security of the safe adults around them in the constellation. There have been numerous households who have required intensive support and without the Hub Carers in Mockingbird the placements for children may have broken down, which would have resulted in them having to move to alternative foster homes, IFA placements or residential homes.

There have been placements for children, which have sadly broken down, even with the support of the Hub Carers. It is evident for these children a foster home setting has not been able to meet their needs and alternative provisions have been sought; however, the Hub Carers and satellite carers maintain contact with the children, via phone calls and visits. It is hoped these continuing relationships will enable the children to return to the constellation in the future.

The feedback from CAMHS colleagues has suggested that the impact of placement breakdown within Mockingbird constellations does not appear to have the same effect on the children. This is because the children, where possible, remain within the same constellation and continue to be supported by the Hub Carers and satellite carers, ensuring relationships can be maintained.

Recruitment and retention of carers

Both Hub Carers and Satellite carers are supportive of one another and through meeting up and training they are building bonds which ensure they do not feel isolated and have support 24/7. There have been a number of carers who have stated if they did not have the support of Mockingbird they may have left fostering. It is particularly supportive for new foster carers who have the benefit of being able to gain advice and support from other more experienced carers.



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Support and training of Carers

Many new carers expressing their desire to join Mockingbird when coming through panel because of the sense of community and support.

- TIMOC training completed with the constellations.
- Therapeutic Carers training for the constellations has been completed.
- Strengthening Relationship training has been completed.
- Regular reflective sessions facilitated by the Mockingbird Liaison Team Leader. These sessions have helped to build a sense of community and a space to reflect on what has gone well, what has been challenging and important topics including trauma informed practices.

Learning So Far

It is evident from our constellations that it is vital there is 'wiggle room' should children need to be cared for by alternative carers. This has been highlighted time and time again within all the constellations. Another important factor is the matching process not only for children but for carers within a constellation. The group need to be able to support one another and have varying skills and diversity. There is evidence from one of the current constellations to suggest that if a satellite carer is not fully invested in the group it can have a negative impact on the whole group. This is a challenge and careful supervision is required for it not to become a block on the group forming and building vital relationships. There has been additional pressure on the Hub Carers over the last few months, which has required them to care full time for children in the constellations on occasions. This has had an impact on the support the Hub Carers can offer the satellite carers at times. This will be closely monitoring moving forward to avoid the risk of the Hub Carers having excess demand and the constellation not getting the support they need to maintain placements for children.

It is evident that within Mockingbird the training offer has been successful with high attendance rates. This is due to the carers feeling safe in their support networks to access training and fully engage as a group. This is an area for development within the wider service.

Signed by Sarah Daly, Director, Children, Families and Education.



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Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

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Agenda Item 6



Portsmouth
CITY COUNCIL

THIS ITEM IS FOR INFORMATION ONLY. (Please note that 'Information Only' reports do not require Equality Impact Assessments, Legal or Finance comments as no decision is being taken.)

Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Children, Families and Education Decision Meeting
Subject:	Private Fostering Annual Report 2022-2023
Date of meeting:	20 July 2023
Report by:	Aimee Dennis (Private Fostering Social Worker)
Wards affected:	None

1 Requested by

1.1 Standard 7.9 of the National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) calls for each Local Authority to create a report to the Director of Children's Services and the local Children's Safeguarding Board. This is being presented for note following review by the Director of Children's Services.

2 Purpose

2.1 The purpose of this report is to highlight the responsibilities that Portsmouth City Council has in relation to Private Fostering. It will look at the current numbers of children and young people in a Private Fostering arrangement and will analyse the issues that are relevant to the children and young people of Portsmouth. It will also look at evaluating the outcomes of Portsmouth City Council's work in relation to Private Fostering.

3 Information Requested Monitoring

3.1 Regulation 12 of the Children (Private Arrangements for Fostering) Regulations 2005 provides that Portsmouth City Council must monitor the discharge of all its functions in relation to Private Fostering.

3.2 The National Minimum Standards for Private Fostering (2005) provides the Local Authority with best possible practice guidance pertaining to Private Fostering, thereby leading to improvements in service delivery and statutory duties.

3.3 Children's Social Care submits an annual report to the Portsmouth Safeguarding Children Partnership on how the welfare of Privately Fostered children in Portsmouth is satisfactorily safeguarded and promoted, and how it is working in co-operation with other agencies.

3.4 The designated Senior Manager and Agency Decision Maker for Private Fostering services is the Interim Head of Children in Care, Michelle Sanders.



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4 Background and Regulations

4.1 Measures introduced nationally were expected to address longstanding problems of:

- low notification rates
- late notifications and;
- The commitment of Local Authorities in meeting the needs of privately fostered children.

4.2 Should the new measures not prove as effective as anticipated, S.45 of the Children Act 2004 gives the Secretary of State power to establish through S.47, a registration scheme for private foster carers. This power has not been enacted as yet and notification rates continue to be low.

4.3 Portsmouth City Council is expected to allocate sufficient resources to identify, assess, and monitor Private Fostering arrangements.

5 Definition

5.1 The Children's Act 1989 defines a Privately Fostered child as a child who is under the age of 16 (18 if disabled) and who is cared for, and provided with accommodation, by someone other than:

- the parent
- a person who is not the parent but who has parental responsibility, or
- a close relative defined in this context as a brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent or step-parent (by marriage or civil partnership).

5.2 A child who is looked after in their own home by an adult is not considered to be Privately Fostered.

6 Provision of service

6.1 Local authorities have a different approach to where the need of Private Fostering is best met. In Portsmouth, the Private Fostering Social Worker is placed in the Fostering Recruitment and Assessment Team while the child's Social Worker is based within the Family Support and Safeguarding Team. All children and young people in a Private Fostering arrangement in Portsmouth are regarded as a Child in Need due to the innate vulnerabilities of being a child living away from home. Children and young people have four weekly regulation eight visits and a current Child in Need plan which is reviewed in line with statutory guidelines.

6.2 The Private Fostering Social Worker is responsible for completing the initial visit and capacity to care assessment.

7 Notification and Requirements

7.1 Notification of a Private Fostering arrangement:



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- A person who proposes to foster a child privately must notify the Local Authority:
- at least six weeks before the arrangement is to begin, or
- Where the arrangement is to begin within six weeks, immediately.
- The notification must be given in writing and where possible on the appropriate form and signed.

7.2 Already fostering a child privately:

7.2.1 A person doing so (e.g., in an emergency which has become a private fostering arrangement) must notify Children's and Families' Service immediately.

7.3 Child's arrival:

7.3.1 A person who made the proposal notification must, within forty-eight hours of commencement, notify the Local Authority that the arrangement has begun, as must the parent or any other person with parental responsibility.

7.3.2 As seen nationally, it is rare in Portsmouth for notifications to be timely in line with the requirements of legislation. This is usually due to carers, parents and involved universal services not being aware of the legal duty to make a notification of Private Fostering or not identifying that an arrangement has been made.

7.3.3 Notification usually occurs after the arrangement has been made and in some cases the arrangement has been in place for several years, meaning the child, carer and parents have not received the support they are entitled to. Throughout 2022-2023 all notifications have been made by family safeguarding team social workers and the MASH. This highlights the need for more awareness raising within the Portsmouth community.

8 Action following notification.

8.1 A Social Worker must, within seven days:

- Visit the premises where the child will be cared for.
- Speak with the Private Foster carer and all household members.
- Speak with the child alone unless the social worker considers it inappropriate.
- Speak with, and if practical to do so, visit, every parent/person with PR.
- Establish such matters as appear to be relevant to the arrangement.

8.2 It is agreed within Portsmouth City Council that the child's allocated Social Worker will complete a Child and Family assessment within seven working days of the notification being received. Portsmouth have been jointly visiting to complete an assessment which allows for more understanding of the home situation, whereby the Private Fostering Social Worker accompanies the child's allocated case holder on the initial visit wherever possible. The Private Fostering Social Worker completes a Private Fostering Initial Assessment which will determine progression to a Capacity to Care assessment.



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- 8.3 The Team Leader of the Fostering Service receives the Private Fostering initial assessment and decides whether the arrangement progresses to a Capacity to Care assessment. In situations where the assessing Social Worker has made a recommendation for prohibition the assessment will be sent to the Service Lead Jackie Clark for a decision, and subsequently sent to Head of Service for an agency decision. This must be validated on the electronic recording system.
- 8.4 If progression to Capacity to Care is agreed the Private Fostering Social Worker must complete this within forty-two working days of the recorded legal date of when the arrangement commenced.
- 8.5 The child's allocated Social Worker must complete a Child and Family assessment.
- 8.6 If the arrangement is satisfactory but enhanced DBS checks have not been returned to Children's Social Care within the forty-two day time frame, the arrangement can be agreed 'subject to satisfactory DBS checks' by the Agency Decision Maker.
- 8.7 While Private Fostering regulations stipulate the visiting frequency to children and young people, they do not stipulate frequency of reviews. All Privately Fostered children and young people's needs are reviewed under Child in Need planning in line with statutory guidance. Portsmouth City Council additionally complete Private Fostering reviews annually. From April 2022 to March 2023 there have been no arrangements that have required an annual review.

9 Determination

9.1 Based on the Capacity to Care assessment the Agency Decision Maker will determine whether the proposal or arrangement is:

- appropriate or,
- requires further enquiries to be undertaken or,
- requirements need to be imposed or,
- consider prohibition, disqualification and removal of a child.

9.2 The Agency Decision Maker will confirm any decision made in writing, within seven working days.

10 Visiting

- 10.1 The child's Social Worker must visit the child or young person within seven days of notification and then at intervals of not more than six weeks for the first twelve months following notification, and not more than twelve week intervals in the second and subsequent years. In addition, the Private Fostering Social Worker for the carer adopts the same arrangement. In Portsmouth, the child is visited every four weeks in line with Child in Need timescales.
- 10.2 The Social Worker must also visit if the child, parent, or private foster carer requests a visit.
- 10.3 It is good practice for occasional visits to be unannounced, and Portsmouth City



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Council does this.

10.4 The Social Worker sees the child alone unless it is considered inappropriate.

10.5 The Social Worker completes a report on the client record system and discusses any concerns with the manager after every visit.

10.6 The worker and supervisor consider after every visit whether:

- the arrangement continues to be satisfactory.
- there may be a need to 'impose requirements' or,
- 'Prohibition' is justified.

10.7 If either of the two latter points applies, the Private Fostering Social Worker and the Agency Decision Maker must be informed, and appropriate action taken. If immediate action is required to safeguard the child, then this will be in accordance with local safeguarding procedures. It is an offence for a Private Foster carer to refuse to allow a child to be visited, or to obstruct a worker discharging their duties towards a child. In such cases an application for a warrant to support power of entry may be required.

11 Requirements

11.1 The Local Authority may impose requirements upon a Private Foster Carer. The Local Authority may link the requirement with a prohibition to come into effect if the Private Foster Carer fails to comply with the requirement in the time allowed.

12 Prohibition

12.1 The Local Authority has the power to impose a prohibition on a person applying to be a Private Foster carer as well as on a person currently doing so.

12.2 The assessing social worker will make recommendation(s) in a report to the Agency Decision Maker, who will seek legal advice to determine whether prohibition is required.

12.3 Any prohibition must be conveyed in writing to the Private Foster Carer by the agency decision maker stating the reasons, appeal process and time limit for doing so.

12.4 The Private Foster Care may appeal to the Family Proceedings Court within fourteen days of the decision being notified.

12.5 If immediate action is needed, the Agency Decision Maker should decide after legal opinion, if prohibition is justified.

12.6 If a child is already being Privately Fostered, the parent(s) should be advised to remove her/him. If this is refused, consideration should be given as to whether the Local Authority should apply for a legal order to remove the child.

12.7 The Agency Decision Maker, following legal advice, can cancel a prohibition if they are satisfied that it is no longer justified.

- Where a prohibition has been imposed, the person is disqualified from:
- Private Fostering,
- working in a children's home,
- working within voluntary organisations,



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- or providing day care or a child-minding service.

12.8 From 2022 to 2023 one arrangement was prohibited in Portsmouth as it was not meeting the welfare needs of the child. This prohibition was not appealed through the court. The young person was supported by the service to return to her father's care.

13 Disqualification

13.1 Children's Social Care must make enquiries to determine whether a proposed or actual Private Foster carer, or household member, is disqualified.

13.2 In exceptional circumstances, it may be considered appropriate for a child to be placed, or to remain, with someone who is disqualified. Such a decision must be ratified by the Deputy Director Children's Social Care with written consent including reasons for this decision.

14 Appeals

14.1 Appeals can be made to the Family Proceedings Court within fourteen days of notification of the decision against:

- requirements,
- prohibitions,
- refusal to allow a disqualified person to care for a child, and
- refusal to exempt a person from the fostering limit of three children.

15 Other LA Duties and Responsibilities

15.1 Children in Need

15.1.1 Children's Social Care staff are required to complete a Single Assessment which results in a 'Child in Need' plan which is reviewed regularly with attendance by the Private Fostering Social Worker.

15.2 Children with disabilities

15.2.1 Where a disabled child is Privately Fostered, her/his parent(s) or a person with parental responsibility (or the child if they have sufficient understanding), must be invited to have the child's name placed on the Register of Children with Disabilities. This may assist in accessing services and equipment to facilitate the wellbeing and development of the child. Private Foster carers should be given details of relevant organisations, including advice lines.

15.3 After Care



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15.3.1 A Private Fostering arrangement ends at a young person's sixteenth birthday (unless the young person is disabled and in this case it would be eighteen). The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 Section 24 (e) outlines that children who have been Privately Fostered are persons qualifying for advice and assistance post sixteen. Portsmouth City Council will support young people after the age of sixteen if their care plan evidences such support is required. The Private Fostering social worker is developing a post sixteen pathway for young people who have left the service. This will help identify children who have been previously Privately Fostered on Mosaic, signpost Privately Fostered young people to support post sixteen and create a robust plan of support prior to leaving the service. The Private Fostering social worker proposes the creating of a leaflet to explain to young people and their carers how to access ongoing support if this is required.

16 Other Forms of Care

16.1 Independent Schools:

16.1.1 Some children attending independent schools require care from host families during school holiday periods. If the arrangement is to last longer than twenty-eight days, it will constitute a 'Private Fostering' situation and those making such arrangements are obliged to inform Children's Social Care and comply with requirements outlined in this report.

16.2 Language Schools:

16.2.1 When children come to the United Kingdom to attend a language school, they can board with a host family and arrangements apply as outlined within this report. The Private Fostering Social Worker sends out communication explaining Private Fostering to all the local language and private schools who enrol children and young people from abroad.

16.3 Holiday Schemes:

16.3.1 If a child boards with a host family, then arrangements apply as outlined in this report.

16.4 Child-minding:

16.4.1 Registered child-minders must inform Children's Social Care if they propose to Privately Foster. During the assessment period the worker must consider the wellbeing and safety of daily minded children as well as any proposed Privately Fostered child.



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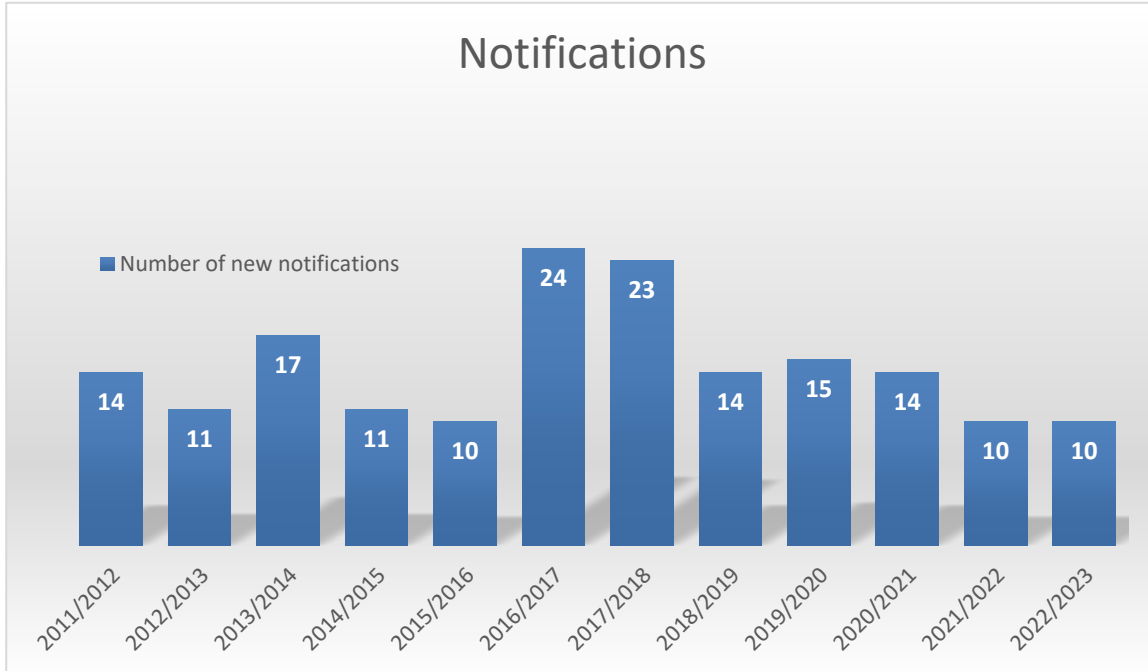
17 Requirement - Promoting Awareness

- 17.1 Portsmouth City Council has invested in a full time lead for Private Fostering, having a Social Worker coordinating this activity and ensuring the service delivery is meeting regulatory requirements. This is divided into two part time roles. This is currently being managed by one part-time Social Worker working 18.5 hours a week.
- 17.2 In March 2021 the leaflets for Private Fostering have been updated and reprinted to ensure accurate information is provided to professionals and the public. The poster has also been updated and reprinted. These publications have been distributed to language schools, libraries, community centres, children's centres and youth clubs across the city. These resources were also delivered electronically to the designated safeguarding leads at Portsmouth infant, junior, primary, senior and private schools.
- 17.3 Regular information about Private Fostering is placed in the Portsmouth Flagship information which is distributed to all Portsmouth households, Children's Services Bulletin, Head Teachers Bulletin and the Diocese of Portsmouth Bulletin, School Governors have been alerted to raise their awareness about Private Fostering. Leaflets and posters have been distributed to Portsmouth schools and Community Centres. Leaflets have been sent to language schools.
- 17.4 Private Fostering briefings have been established to raise awareness for professionals working with children, including the locality teams, early help, health, and education. These have now been implemented virtually and are held bi monthly which will enable regular training opportunities to new starters across services. These will be held at different times to try and engage as many agencies as possible. When distributing information about the briefings the Private Fostering Social Worker also advertises the ability to join meetings within agencies to deliver training and information about Private Fostering.

18 Local Perspective - Portsmouth

- 18.1 Information collected mirrors the national situation in relation to low notifications of Private Fostering arrangements. Portsmouth City Council has recorded the same number of notifications from the previous year. There were ten new notifications that led to Initial Assessments from 2022-2023, ten notifications from 2021-2022, fourteen notifications from 2020-21, fifteen notifications from 2019-2020, fourteen notifications from 2018-2019 and twenty three from 2017-2018.

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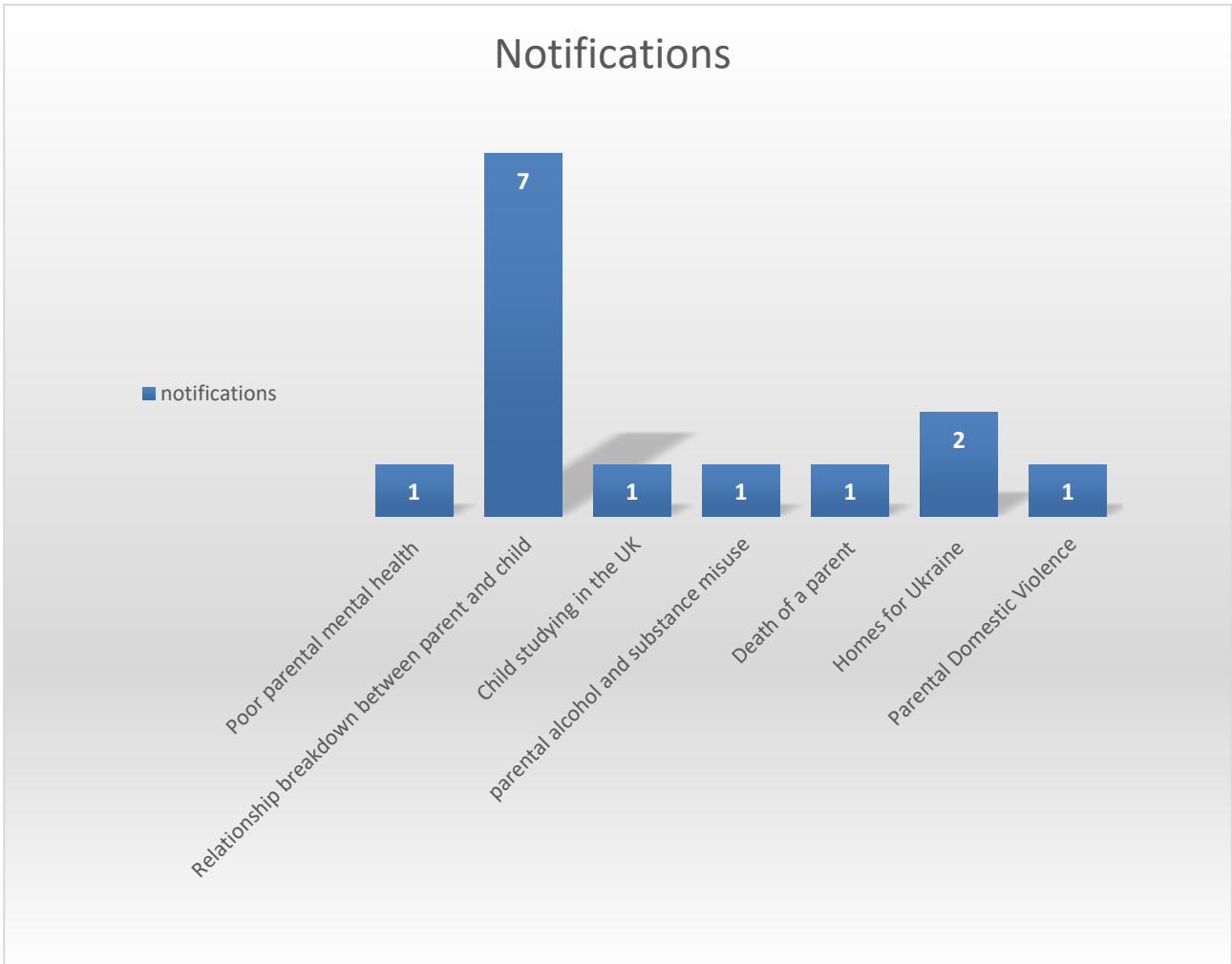


18.1 Four arrangement were ongoing from 2021-2022 so in total there were fourteen Private Fostering Arrangements active between 2022 and 2023.

- The fourteen arrangements relate to fourteen children and young people.
- Between April 2022 and March 2023 there have been a variety of reasons why Private Fostering arrangements have commenced in Portsmouth.

18.2 Out of the fourteen Private Fostering arrangements, relationship breakdown between parents/guardians and children, children studying in the United Kingdom staying with a host family, parental mental health difficulties, parental domestic abuse and relationship breakdown, unexpected death of a parent, parental alcohol and substance misuse and the homes for Ukrainian children scheme were the reasons recorded for children staying in Private Fostering arrangements during 2022-2023. It is important to note that nine out of the fourteen children and young people were in Private Fostering arrangements because of two or more of the recorded reasons.

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19 Source of notification.

- 19.1 The ten new notifications were referred by the Locality teams and MASH. No new notifications have been made by any other agency.

Notification source	Number of notifications
Safeguarding Team	8
MASH	2

20 Relationship between the carer and the child

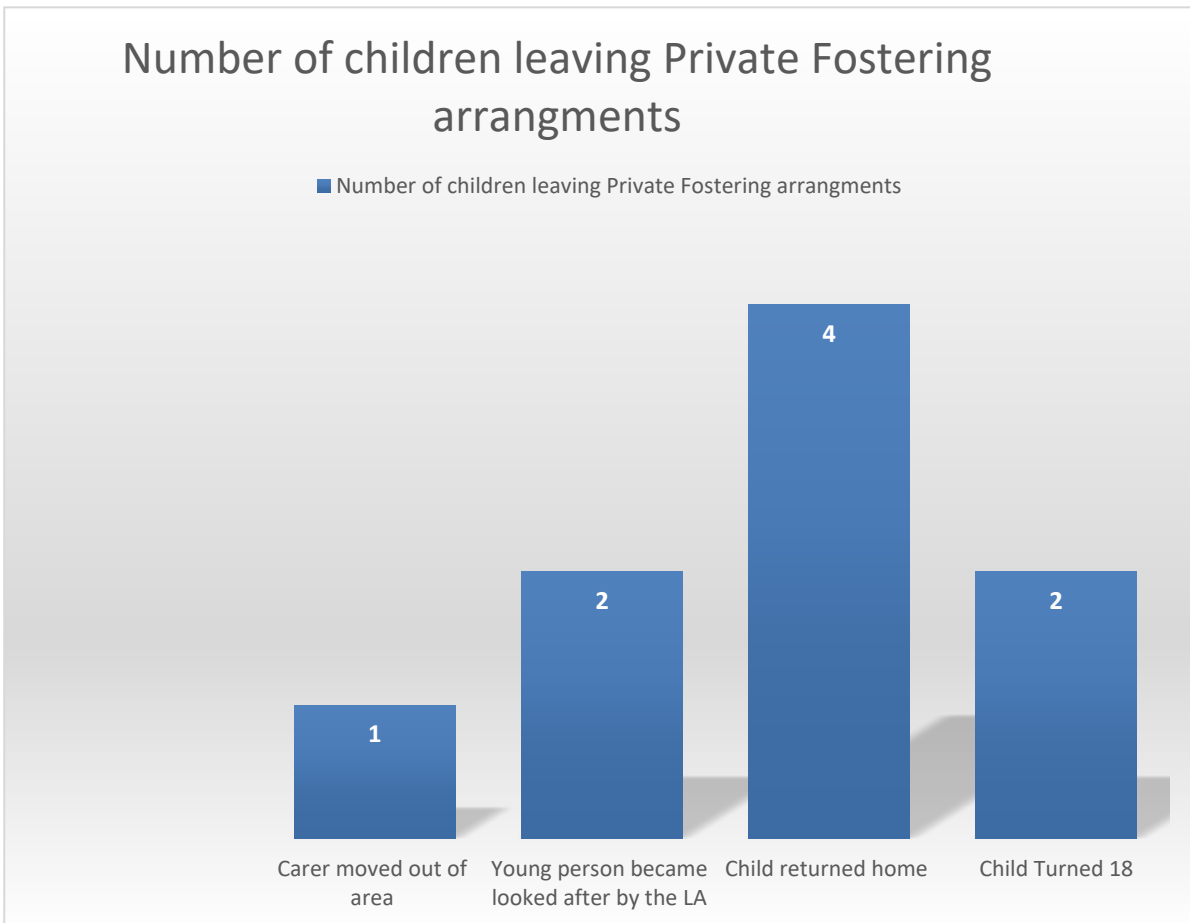
- 20.1 There are various relationships between privately fostered children and their carers' which are detailed in the chart below.



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Relationship between carer and child	Number of children
Extended family member	4
The parent of the child or young person's friend	2
Family friend	1
Host family	1
The parents of the child or young person's boyfriend/girlfriend	2
Homes for Ukraine	2
Step parent	2

21 Duration of arrangement



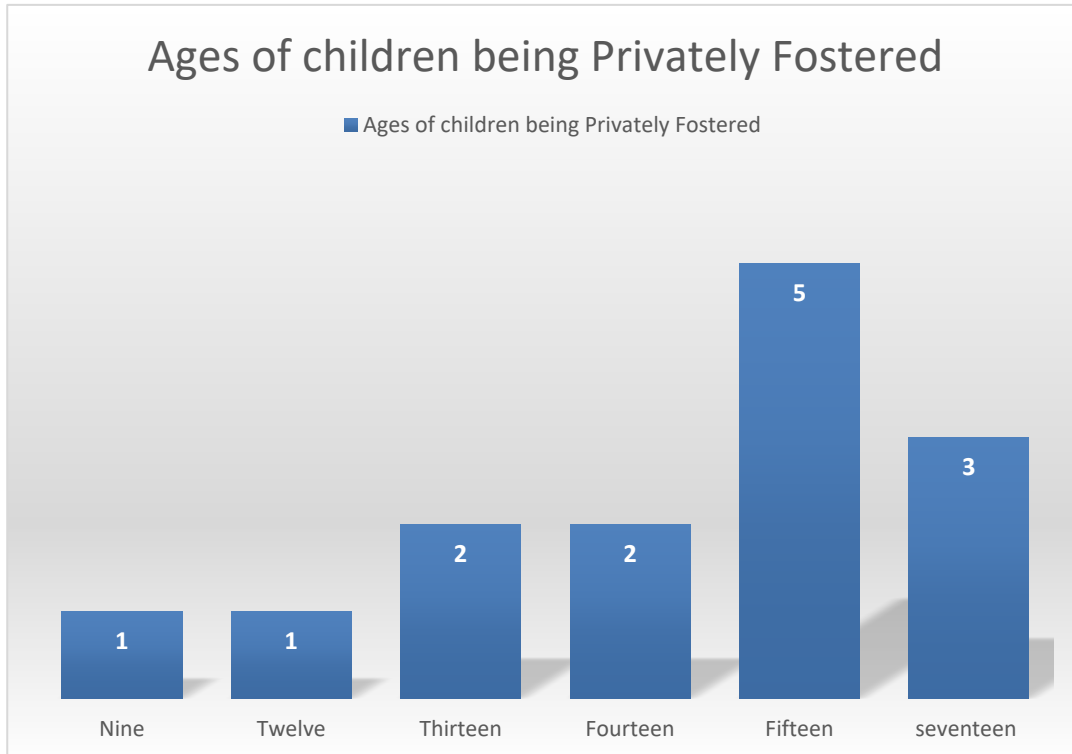
21.1 On the 31.03.2023 five of the fourteen children and young people are in ongoing Private Fostering arrangements. Nine arrangements have ended.

21.2 One carer moved out of the Portsmouth area, two young people became looked after by the Local Authority, four children and young people returned home to their parents' care, and two young people turned 18 who remained with their Private Foster carers.

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22 Ages of children

22.1 The ages of the children in Private Fostering Arrangements from 2022-2023 varied from nine to seventeen.



22.2 Twelve children and young people, who were privately fostered during the year, had been living with either their parents or close relatives prior to the arrangement being made. One child had been living in Private Fostering arrangements that had been prohibited in the year 2021-2022 and one child had been living with SGO carers.

23 Health Issues

23.1 There is no statutory requirement for carers to have a full medical assessment but there is a requirement that background information is sought. The Private Fostering Social Worker sends a questionnaire to each Private Foster carer's GP requesting information on current health issues, any prescribed medication, any prognosis of treatment being received, and any health issues which could affect the carers' capacity to care. Historically there have been cases where the information provided has been inadequate or unclear, and the Private Fostering Social Worker has had to rely on the carer disclosing significant information regarding their health. Out of fourteen Private Fostering arrangements, ten medical questionnaires have been completed by GP's. This is an area which has shown some improvement but identifies the importance of awareness raising within GP practises to get every questionnaire completed promptly.



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23.2 Health consent cards have been used with success to allow parents to give consent for medical treatment. The cards are signed by the parents and provided to the carer to be used when required. This is particularly helpful when parents live outside of Portsmouth.

24 Ethnicity

24.1 Information has been gathered about the ethnic origin, country of birth, and religion of the carers and the child or young person who is privately fostered.

Ethnicity of carer	Number of carers
White British	15
Black African	1
White Lithuanian	1
White British and Black Caribbean	1

Ethnicity of child	Number of children
White British	8
White Ukranian	2
Black African	1
Black African and white British	2
White Lithuanian	1

25 Financial Issues

25.1 Private Foster carers can claim Child Benefit (CB) and Child Tax Credit (CTC) or Universal Credit if they are eligible. Finances are an issue for the Private Fostering family with many of them struggling to manage to give the children opportunities that would be considered important to childhood development.

25.2 Of the fourteen arrangements within the past year, two were supported financially by persons with parental responsibility which they had agreed with the Private Foster carer. Two arrangements were financially supported by the Homes for Ukraine scheme.

26 Profile of the children and young people.

26.1 Eleven of the fourteen children and young people living in Private Fostering arrangements from 2022-2023 have previously been subject to Child in Need or Child Protection planning in Portsmouth or Hampshire.

- Nine of fourteen young people who are Privately Fostered made their own Private Fostering arrangement.



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27 Resources

27.1 Portsmouth City Council is expected to allocate sufficient resources to identify, advise upon, and monitor private fostering arrangements. The role is 37 hours per week which has been divided between two part time social workers working in the Connected Persons team. One of the part time workers has left the team meaning Private Fostering is being covered by one part-time worker who returned from Maternity Leave in November 2022.

28 Update on the Action plan from 2022-2023.

28.1 Both part time Private Fostering Social Workers will return from maternity leave 2022. The Fostering Service was unable to recruit to these posts and therefore they were covered by one connected persons assessment Social Worker within the connected persons team.

One of the Private Fostering Social Workers returned to working 18.5 hours in November 2022. The other part time Social Worker left the connected persons team and the role has been advertised. The role is currently being managed by one part time social worker in the connected persons team.

28.2 The Private Fostering Social Worker will continue to work with the Marketing and Communications team to increase the profile of Private Fostering on social media to raise awareness and to create a Marketing plan for 2022-2023 to ensure available opportunities are taken to raise awareness of Private Fostering.

The Private Fostering social worker met with Annette Harley on the 21.02.2023 to discuss Private Fostering marketing plan and raising awareness opportunities for the year 2023 to 2024. The new plan has been included within this report and I respectfully refer the reader to section 29. Throughout 2022-2023 the marketing department ensured that Private Fostering awareness was included in publications and posts created on social media to target the wider public within Portsmouth.

28.3 The Private Fostering Social Worker will directly target those who work with children and young people in health, education, police, community services and voluntary agencies to raise awareness of Private Fostering. The Social Worker has attended and presented to MAT network meetings.

In 2022-2023 agencies working with children and young people have been invited to Private Fostering briefings held online. When sending out invites, information and resources have been provided to ensure that the agencies have a basic understanding of what Private Fostering is. The private fostering social worker has also communicated that she is available to present to individual teams should this be preferred.



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28.4 Private Fostering briefings will continue to be held bimonthly and invites will be sent out in advance via communications and promotional material sent to outside agencies.

Private Fostering briefings are now being held through the platform Microsoft Teams. Advertising for this has been sent out through communications emails. Promotional material has been sent to schools and the police service. Moving forward more promotional material will be sent out to different services which will include the dates of upcoming briefings. Briefings will continue to be held every two months allowing new staff and different agencies to attend.

28.5 The Private Fostering Social Worker to continue to attend the Coram BAAF special interest group for Private Fostering.

The Private Fostering social worker has attended the Coram BAAF special interest groups for Private Fostering Social Workers. This is a helpful forum to meet with other social workers nationwide and to learn what is working for them in raising awareness, discussing practise matters and legislation.

28.6 The Private Fostering Social Worker to attend meetings of the newly created Southern Private Fostering raising awareness group.

The southern Private Fostering raising awareness group includes practitioners from our neighbouring authorities. This is a forum to share best practise and ideas.

28.7 With support from the Head of Service a process for Annual Reviews of Private Fostering arrangements will be created with an Identified Independent Reviewer.

The Private Fostering social worker is working with her team manager to create an annual review pathway. Reviews will be conducted by the Connected Person's Team Leader. All Privately Fostered children are subject to Child in Need planning and their plans are reviewed within statutory timescales. This means that Privately Fostered children plans are reviewed regularly.

28.8 Develop a feedback form for children, carers and parents so their views can be recorded and included in the Annual Review 2022-2023.

The feedback form was not created in 2022-2023 as the Private Fostering social worker was on maternity leave. The private fostering social worker works closely with the parents, carers and children who are living in Private Fostering arrangements capturing their views regularly including them in assessments and reviews. The Private Fostering social worker will develop a feedback form for 2023-2024 to formally capture views of everyone involved in Private Fostering arrangements.



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29 Action plan for 2023-2024.

- 29.1 A social worker will be recruited to the connected persons team to ensure the Private Fostering role is increased to 37 hours.
- 29.2 The Private Fostering Social Worker will continue to work with the Marketing and Communications team to increase the profile of Private Fostering on social media to raise awareness and to utilise the Marketing plan for 2023-2024 to ensure available opportunities are taken to raise awareness of Private Fostering.
- 29.3 The Private Fostering Social Worker will directly target those who work with children and young people in health, education, police, community services and voluntary agencies to raise awareness of Private Fostering.
- 29.4 Private Fostering briefings will continue to be held bimonthly and invites will be sent out in advance via communications and promotional material sent to outside agencies.
- 29.5 The Private Fostering Social Worker to continue to attend the Coram BAAF special interest group for Private Fostering with the aim of improving practise and learning from colleagues across other Local Authorities.
- 29.6 The Private Fostering Social Worker to attend meetings of the Southern Private Fostering raising awareness group.
- 29.7 The Private Fostering Social Worker will develop a feedback form for children, carers, and parents so their views can be recorded and included in the Annual Review 2023-2024.
- 29.8 To write and develop a post sixteen/eighteen pathway plan for young people who have been Privately Fostered. This will help identify young people who have been privately fostered. It will provide them with a plan of support post sixteen and provide information on how to seek advice and support in the future.

30 Marketing Plan 2023-2024 created by Annette Harley.

- 30.1 Q1: Digital short video, Foster Portsmouth Facebook post & story, Foster Portsmouth e-bulletin article, digital asset development.
- 30.2 Q2: Case study development, Portsmouth City Council website page development, Foster Portsmouth Facebook post, Foster Portsmouth e-bulletin advert, poster/flier distribution, e.g., to schools/medical centres.
- 30.3 Q3: Private Fostering Week campaign, Flagship article, Foster. Portsmouth Facebook banner advert, Portsmouth City Council social posts & stories*, Foster Portsmouth Facebook post & story, Foster Portsmouth e-bulletin article, Portsmouth City Council e-bulletin articles**, Family Life Facebook post, digital asset development #2, CFE newsletter, medical/NHS newsletters, e-shot, Newsflash to foster carers, CFE staff email, Foster Portsmouth Facebook advertising, House talk magazine article, local Facebook group posts, PCC/Google advertising, press release, Portsmouth City Council website news article.
- 30.4 Q4: Foster Portsmouth Facebook post, Foster Portsmouth e-bulletin advert.



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Signed by Sarah Daly (Director Children, Families and Education)

Appendices:

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location

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Title of meeting:	Cabinet Member for Children Families and Education
Subject:	Local Authority Maintained School Balances at 31 March 2023
Date of meeting:	20 July 2023
Report by:	Sarah Daly, Director, Children, Families and Education
Wards affected:	All Wards

1. Requested by

Cabinet Member for Children Families and Education

2. Purpose

The purpose of this report is to inform Cabinet Member of the level of Local Authority maintained schools' revenue and capital balances as at 31 March 2023.

3. Information Requested

- 3.1. Each year schools are given delegated budgets which are calculated using the locally agreed national funding formula. These budgets are supplemented by specific government grants (e.g. Pupil Premium) and through the income generated by the school. Delegated revenue budgets are intended to be spent during the year on the existing cohort of pupils, although it is prudent for a school to retain a small surplus to provide for future uncertainties.
- 3.2. Schools do spend the vast majority of funds directly on the education of their pupils. However, there are a number of genuine reasons why schools may accumulate a balance at yearend; for example, to provide for planned building works or to provide consistency in staffing levels during funding fluctuations relating to predicted changes in numbers on roll.
- 3.3. In some cases, factors outside of the control of the school can cause increases in balances; for example, large capital building schemes may slip from one year into the next.
- 3.4. Whilst devolved formula capital allocations are ring fenced for capital purposes only, schools may use revenue balances to support capital schemes. In 2022-23, schools allocated some £0.8m of revenue funding to capital purposes (compared to £1.6m in 2021-22).

- 3.5. Schools were surveyed during the spring term to ascertain future commitments against estimated closing balances in order to provide data in accordance with Consistent Financial Reporting (CFR) requirements. This data has since been updated to reflect actual, rather than estimated, closing balances.
- 3.6. In 2014 Schools Forum agreed to discontinue the "balance control mechanism" (i.e., a "clawback" system) and to implement proposals to strengthen the monitoring arrangements. An extract from the current Scheme for Financing Schools is shown at Appendix 1 that highlights the 'controls on surplus balances' together with the items that can be deemed committed within the year-end balances.

4. Revenue Balances

- 4.1. The following table illustrates the level of schools' revenue balances over the last three years:

Sector	No. of schools as at 31/3/21	Balance as at 01/04/21 £	% of 2020/21 budget allocation	No. of schools as at 31/3/22	Balance as at 01/04/22 £	% of 2021/22 budget allocation	No. of schools as at 31/3/23	Balance as at 01/04/23 £	% of 2022/23 budget allocation
Nursery & Primary schools	19	4,130,191	14.60	16	3,580,452	12.02	16	3,518,325	14.18
Secondary schools	2	878,465	6.97	2	847,344	6.16	2	1,550,068	10.72
Total	21	5,008,656	12.25	18	4,427,796	10.17	18	5,068,392	12.90

- 4.2. No schools converted to academy during the 2021-22 and 2022-23 financial years, so the table above provides a direct comparison between the two financial years.
- 4.3. It is important to note that the total schools' balances of £5.1m as at 1 April 2023 include £0.296m (£0.131m 2021/22) of community related balances e.g. Community Improvement Partnerships, community lettings, breakfast and after school clubs etc. leaving £4.8m (£4.3m 2021/22) of "curriculum" balances relating to core activity. Of this, a further £1.3m (£0.8m 2021/22) has been committed to specific projects or initiatives, leaving a balance of £3.5m, or 9% of the 2022/23 budget allocation, as genuinely uncommitted. This exceeds the CIPFA guideline of between 2-3% of budget for uncommitted balances.
- 4.4. Overall, 33% (6) of schools saw an increase in their balances when compared to 2021-22, this is lower than the previous year, when 61% of schools (11) saw an increase in balances.
- 4.5. Of the 12 schools that saw a decrease in balances, seven had balances more than 10% of their budget share and are not of concern. Three schools form part of the reducing balance review as set out in Section 5,

and one school, Manor Infant School, is in deficit and the authority is working closely with the school to review the recovery plan

5. Review of Specific School Balances

- 5.1 The school revenue balances as at 31st March 2023 are shown by school at Appendix 2. Over the 2022-23 financial year there has been an increase in the number of schools seeking support to maintain financial stability and manage the longer term impact of the current economic climate. Additionally, some schools meet the criteria of having excessive balances. The following paragraphs set out the explanations for the level of balances and any action being taken.

Reducing balances

- 5.2 During 2016-17 Schools Forum requested that the council contact the Chair of Governors for schools with reducing or low balances as at 31st March 2016. This process now forms part of the annual review of school balances.
- 5.3 As part of the year-end monitoring process of school balances, a review was undertaken to identify those schools that have shown a continued or significant reduction (defined as 25% or more) in their level of curriculum balances and whose total balances form less than 8% (primary) or 5% (secondary schools) of their budget share.

Update on schools with reducing balances on 31 March 2022

- 5.4 As at 31 March 2022 there were three schools that meet the reducing balances criteria (para.5.3), the balances have been reviewed at the end of 2022-23 and an update provided on their financial position:
- Manor Infant the deficit has increased, and the school has produced a deficit recovery plan and the authority continues to work closely with them to develop a sustainable solution.
 - St Georges Beneficial C of E Primary balances have increased by 99% compared to 2021-22 but remain at less than 8% of the budget share.
 - St Swithuns Catholic Primary, balances have increased by 20% compared to 2021-22 but remain at less than 8% of the budget share.
- 5.5 As at 31 March 2023 there were three schools that meet the reducing balances criteria (para.5.3), all schools have been contacted and two have responded to the authority confirming:
- **Bramble Infant and Nursery:** that whilst overall the school remains in surplus they have a deficit on their curriculum balances, the Governing Body has confirmed that they are aware of the financial situation and have developed and agreed a management plan to stop the school going into deficit and maintain financial sustainability.

- **St Pauls Roman Catholic Primary:** the Governing body are in the process of developing a business plan to manage the schools expenditure and stop the school from going into deficit.
- 5.6 At the time of writing the report a response had not been received from St Judes C of E Primary School, but the authority is in discussion with the school regarding the financial position.
- 5.7 It should be noted that whilst some schools may not meet the criteria of reducing balances, the level of balances could be a cause for concern. The authority is in contact with these schools and is working with them to ensure financial stability.

Excessive balances

- 5.8 The Scheme for Financing Schools categorises Primary & Special Schools who have uncommitted balances of more than 8% of budget share as having excessive balances. For Secondary Schools, the threshold is 5% of budget share.
- 5.9 Of the eight Primary schools with uncommitted balances over 8%, six have balances between 10% and 20% and two have uncommitted balances over 20% and had balances of over 20% in 2021-22.
- 5.10 For Secondary Schools, one had uncommitted balances of more than 5% of the budget share at 14.6% of the budget share.
- 5.11 Analysis of the reasons for the high balances are set out below.

St John's Catholic Primary

- 5.12 St John's Catholic Primary year end balances have decreased by £3,685 from £335,433 at the end of March 2022 to £347,748 at the end of March 2023. The school has indicated that £24,211 of their balance is committed, with £323,537 being uncommitted.
- 5.13 With regards to the uncommitted balance of £323,537, this equates to 27.7% of the school's budget share.
- 5.14 The Governing Board have had two projects outstanding since 2019-20 which have been carried forward to future years due to the impact of the national lockdowns and the availability of building contractors. To date, the refurbishment of the playground is yet to start following continuing difficulties in finding a suitable contractor. The project to maintain the flat roof and replace the roofing tiles was delayed for similar reasons, whilst the school has been able to secure a contractor, they will not be able to undertake the work until summer holidays 2023 due to prior commitments. There are no other plans or commitments brought forward from previous years.

5.15 The school has identified that they had a small in year deficit at the end of 2022-23 which reduced their balances by 1% of the previous year. They are planning to utilise their balances to support the two large projects set out in the paragraph above. They are conscious of several uncertainties regarding future funding against their wish to continue to support pupils with the continuing post-Covid recovery and are retaining the remaining balances to support any related one off, short term expenditure.

Wimborne Primary School

5.16 Wimborne Primary School year end balances have decreased by £48,669 from £631,801 at the end of March 2022 to £583,102 at the end of March 2023. The school has indicated that £48,142 of their balance is committed, with £534,960 being uncommitted.

5.17 With regards to the uncommitted balance of £534,960, this equates to 23.25% of the school's budget share.

5.18 In 2022-23 the school had committed to using part of the balances to support several capital projects over the next two years with three projects expected to be completed in 2022-23. Of these projects the playground resurfacing, trim trails and gates have all been completed. The school is expecting to use £141,500 of the balances to support further capital projects in 2023-24 including:

- Refurbishment of children's toilets in the infants building
- Improving the security of the site with additional fencing
- IT Infrastructure.

5.19 The school is expecting the balances to reduce over the next five years as they implement a plan to update the classrooms in the school.

5.20 The authority continues to work with all schools to support the effective financial management of the available financial resources, varying the level of support in accordance to the specific needs of the school. It is hoped that the support and advice will help these schools to achieve and maintain, long term financial stability.

6. Capital Balances

6.1 Devolved capital allocations are ring fenced and schools are expected to spend them on priority capital needs of school buildings. These allocations will therefore be held as capital balances until they are used and may be supplemented by funding from other sources.

6.2 An analysis of schools' current capital balances is given at Appendix 3, together with proposed spending plans as returned in the school survey. Where spending plans exceed balances there will need to be additional funding proposals.

6.3 The table below illustrates the level of school capital balances for the last three years:

Sector	No. of schools as at 31/3/21	Balance as at 01/04/21 £	No. of schools as at 31/3/22	Balance as at 01/04/22 £	No. of schools as at 31/3/23	Balance as at 01/04/23 £
Nursery & Primary schools	19	532,890	16	464,657	16	505,705
Secondary schools	2	1,824,317	2	2,549,241	2	3,158,989
Total	21	2,357,207	18	3,013,898	18	3,664,694

Note: the above totals are the aggregate of surplus and deficit balances

6.4 As there were no academy conversions in 2021-22 and 2022-23 the Table above provides a direct comparison.

6.5 Overall, there has been an increase in capital balances, mostly relating to St Edmunds RC Secondary School. This relates to a large Capital project that is currently in progress. The small reduction in Primary capital balances is due to works identified at the end of 2021-22 financial year being completed during 2022-23.

7. Reasons for recommendations

This report is for information only and Cabinet Member is asked to note the contents of the report.

Signed by Sarah Daly, Director, Children, Families and Education.

Appendices:

Appendix 1: extracts from the current Scheme for Financing Schools

Appendix 2: schools' revenue balances at 31 March 2023

Appendix 3: schools' capital balances and commitments at 31 March 2023

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

Title of document	Location
School Balances Files and Spreadsheets	Education Finance
Scheme For Financing Schools	PCC website

APPENDIX 1

Extracts from the current Scheme For Financing Schools

4.2 Controls on surplus balances

As schools are moving towards greater autonomy and should not be constrained from making early efficiencies and to support medium term budgeting in a tighter financial climate, the balance control (clawback) mechanism for excessive balances continues to be withdrawn.

Schools will be deemed to have excessive balances, when Primary and Special Schools have uncommitted balances in excess of 8% and Secondary Schools 5% of their budget shares.

The control framework for monitoring school balances and their intended use requires that:

- a. Schools will continue to be asked to provide a breakdown of their year-end balances between committed and uncommitted, as well as an analysis of the intended use of any committed balances. The Education and Children's Finance team will continue to co-ordinate the process.
- b. A School Balances report will be presented to both the Cabinet member for Children's and Education and Schools Forum, following the completion of the year-end closedown process. This report will provide an analysis of the balances by school and schools with significant balances may be highlighted specifically within the report.
- c. Those schools identified as potentially breaching the balance thresholds, will be asked to provide further evidence of the planned use of their balances. The information will be reported back to Elected Members, the Schools Forum and the Education Department.
- d. The Education Department will consider this information as part of its school performance and improvement service provision, school challenge and specific reviews.

In determining whether school balances are committed, schools are only permitted to assign as committed, items listed in Annex 6.

School Forum may revisit the balance control (clawback) mechanism and the above control framework from time to time and where they believe significant and excessive balances have accumulated.

Annex 6 –PERMITTED SPECIFIC PURPOSES FOR THE USE OF SURPLUS FUNDS

- Valid orders placed through the financial system, but for which the goods have not been received.
- Funds held on behalf of other schools by fund holder schools (e.g., cluster funding).
- Balances held for specific community projects e.g., nursery provision, children's' centres, extended services.
- Contribution towards capital works with the school (where alternative capital resources have been exhausted). A clear statement of intent signed by the Chair of Governors (subject to clawback if not delivered in stated timescales - maximum 3 years).
- Providing consistency in staffing levels where numbers on roll are predicted to fluctuate within the next year (note that a reasonable commitment would be £3,000 per pupil and forecast variations in pupil numbers should be given).
- Unexpected funds received by the school near the year-end which will be utilised for a specific purpose in the following financial year.



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**APPENDIX 2
SCHOOLS REVENUE BALANCES AS AT 31 MARCH 2023**

The figures in the table above may not sum exactly due to rounding.

DFE No.	Balance as @ 31/03/2022	% of 2021/22 Budget Share Allocation	School Name	2022/23 Budget Share	Analysis of Balance		Balance as @ 31/03/2023	% of 2022/23 Budget Share Allocation	Uncommitted as % of Budget Share Allocation	Committed as % of Budget Share Allocation
					Uncommitted	Committed				
PRIMARY & NURSERY SCHOOLS										
2008	505,715	17.75%	Copnor Primary	2,830,462	494,341	222,733	717,074	25.33%	17.47%	7.87%
2716	330,564	16.74%	Craneswater Junior	2,019,210	212,379	64,529	276,908	13.71%	10.52%	3.20%
2665	137,787	17.20%	Cumberland Infant	825,947	122,350		122,350	14.81%	14.81%	
2648	122,029	12.46%	Devonshire Infant	1,005,707	11,940	105,000	116,940	11.63%	1.19%	10.44%
2714	345,144	21.37%	Fernhurst Junior	1,591,844	244,696	96,480	341,176	21.43%	15.37%	6.06%
2637	76,759	9.33%	Bramble Infant & Nursery	1,146,916	48,720	14,000	62,720	5.47%	4.25%	1.22%
2719	(18,255)	-1.55%	Manor Infant	1,143,638	(64,316)		(64,316)	-5.62%	-5.62%	
2673	83,825	8.10%	Medina Primary	1,073,330	91,885	27,500	119,385	11.12%	8.56%	2.56%
2765	398,339	18.00%	Portsdown Primary	2,236,696	435,474	5,802	441,276	19.73%	19.47%	0.26%
2680	133,313	14.85%	Southsea Infant	932,951	48,488	48,000	96,488	10.34%	5.20%	5.14%
3214	54,377	3.15%	St Georges Beneficial C of E Primary	1,753,603	108,250		108,250	6.17%	6.17%	
3422	351,433	30.76%	St Johns Catholic Primary	1,167,865	323,537	24,211	347,748	29.78%	27.70%	2.07%
3212	177,260	9.83%	St Judes C of E Primary	1,854,952	52,261	4,080	56,341	3.04%	2.82%	0.22%
5207	175,852	10.70%	St Pauls Catholic Primary	1,565,553	80,591	23,138	103,729	6.63%	5.15%	1.48%
3423	74,509	5.64%	St Swithuns Catholic Primary	1,354,220	89,154		89,154	6.58%	6.58%	
2013	631,801	26.45%	Wimborne Primary	2,309,124	534,960	48,142	583,102	25.25%	23.17%	2.08%
	3,580,452		Total Primary & Nursery	24,812,016	2,834,710	683,615	3,518,325	14.18%	11.42%	2.76%
SECONDARY SCHOOLS										
4303	63,271	0.85%	Mayfield Secondary	7,811,958	686	55,672	56,358	0.72%	0.01%	0.71%
5413	784,073	12.42%	St Edmunds Catholic Secondary	6,650,957	969,710	524,000	1,493,710	22.46%	14.58%	7.88%
	847,344		Total Secondary	14,462,915	970,396	579,672	1,550,068	10.72%	6.71%	4.01%
	3,580,452		Primary	24,812,016	2,834,710	683,615	3,518,325	14.18%	11.42%	2.76%
	847,344		Secondary	14,462,915	970,396	579,672	1,550,068	10.72%	6.71%	4.01%
	4,427,796		Total	39,274,931	3,805,106	1,263,287	5,068,392	12.90%	9.69%	3.22%

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**APPENDIX 3
SCHOOLS CAPITAL BALANCES AS AT 31 MARCH 2023**

Balance as @ 31/03/2022		Balance as @ 31/03/2023	Spending Plan	Description of Plan	Projected Balance
PRIMARY & NURSERY SCHOOLS					
20,281	Copnor Primary		70,000	Covering walkway between KS1 & KS2	
			20,280	Automated driveway gates	
			25,995	Upgrade to lighting	
			44,985	Kitchen and soft play area refurbishment	
		41,535	161,260		(119,725)
(26,986)	Craneswater Junior		5,000	Replacement if lights to classrooms	
		1,292	5,000		(3,708)
8,063	Cumberland Infant				
		15,465	0		15,465
4,844	Devonshire Infant		10,000	Replacement server project	
			13,651	Energy efficiencies	
		24,543	23,651		892
					0
2,401	Fernhurst Junior		16,881	LED Lighting / Replacement Doors	
		20,244	16,881		3,363
18,366	Bramble Infant & Nursery		17,511	Replacing admin PC	
		17,922	17,511		411
3,982	Manor Infant				
		24,768	0		24,768
9,427	Medina Primary				
		23,528	0		23,528

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Balance as @ 31/03/2022		Balance as @ 31/03/2023	Spending Plan	Description of Plan	Projected Balance
44,504	Portsmouthdown Primary		4,969	Upper Girls toilet aria	
			12,750	Contribution boiler works capital programme	
			10,000	Ongoing repairs	
			15,000	Children's & Staff toilet aria	
			20,000	Nursery ramp replacement	
			200,000	Upgrade of lighting fixtures to LED	
		46,527	262,719		(216,192)
(14,482)	Southsea Infant				
		(927)	0		(927)
33,052	St Georges Beneficial Primary				
		29,127	0		29,127
221,263	St Johns RC Primary		50,000	Playground refurbishment	
			2,410	Upgrade fire doors (fire risk assessment report)	
			10,000	Programme of upgrade to IT	
			3,300	Outbuilding repairs to roof	
			3,300	Outbuilding roof repairs	
			9,000	Cycle shelter	
			2,561	Work to skylight Music room and upgrade to lighting	
		193,157	80,571		112,586
30,436	St Jude's CE Primary				
		27,516	0		27,516
8,213	St Paul's RC Primary		8,000	IT Equipment upgrade	
			4,924	Diocese - Salix Loan repayment	
		(949)	12,924		(13,873)
0	St Swithun's RC Primary		0		
		0	0		0



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Balance as @		Balance as @	Spending Plan	Description of Plan	Projected Balance
31/03/2022		31/03/2023			
101,294	Wimborne Primary		29,846	Infant girls toilet	
			27,724	Infant boys toilet	
			14,124	YR toilet	
			1,286	Infant entrance area	
			7,597	Toilet flooring	
		41,957	80,577		(38,620)
464,657	Total Primary	505,705	661,094		(155,389)
SECONDARY SCHOOLS					
(49,183)	Mayfield		45,869	Relocation of temporally classroom from Westover Primary	
		48,129	45,869		2,260
2,598,424	St Edmunds RC		3,515,986	New Art Block (EAB004)	
			2,837	Wright Block project (EAB009)	
			46,854	Capital works general/Contingency (EAB008)	
		3,110,860	3,565,677		(454,817)
2,549,241	Total Secondary	3,158,989	3,611,546		(452,557)
SUMMARY					
464,657	Primary Schools	505,705	661,094		(155,389)
2,549,241	Secondary Schools	3,158,989	3,611,546		(452,557)
3,013,898		3,664,694	4,272,640		(607,946)

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