

## **An insight into being DCS at Plymouth City Council**

I made the decision to move from working in London to join PCC eight and a half years ago, firstly as Assistant Director and have been DCS for the last three and a half years. It has been one of the best decisions I have made - I remember well the mixture of excitement and trepidation as I started my new job, and I have never once regretted my decision.

Plymouth is great city and PCC plays a central leadership role in place shaping and facilitating effective systems leadership. We work collaboratively and constructively with all key partners and sectors. For children and young people in the city we keep their voice and involvement central to every level of our planning and delivery. We are a Trauma Informed City and have a Trauma Informed Charter. This has been a ground up development that really is at the core of how we, and our partners, work with families.

Take a look at our Children and Young People's Plan "Bright Future" and you will see their views and wishes, and how they inform our vision and priorities. Our Young Safe guardians are members of a Safeguarding Partnership, and our Listen and Care Council shape and determine shared priorities for the Corporate Parents Group.

We have many challenges and the impact of COVID has seen a significant increase in demand. We have agreed additional capacity and resource to address this, while keeping focused on our improvement journey. This includes the priorities we need to focus on, for our secondary aged children and young people, in improving their educational attainment and outcomes. We have developed a strong place-based approach to ensure accelerated improvement in the quality of education provided in secondary schools. A joint approach with the RSC saw us jointly support the "Plymouth Commission" and develop a shared strategic framework for improvement with MAT CEOs and head teachers. This led to us being identified as a trailblazer, in this place based approach with significant additional funding from the DfE going to the secondary sector.

At the same time we have developed an innovative and dynamic relationship with key partners addressing the skills agenda, and our Skills Launchpad has developed from a well-used digital platform established last June, to a city centre base. With a youth hub and strong arrangements to ensure our Care Leavers and other vulnerable and disadvantaged young people are well linked in.

Within Children's Social Care we have continued to work with partners to implement and sustain positive improvements such as: a successful PAUSE project; an Adolescent Support Team, working successfully to support young people on the Edge of Care and some real successes with reunification work; improving our In House Fostering provision and capacity; increasing our capacity to meet the needs of our Care Leavers; improve our YOT, with a focus on early intervention and diversion work at the earliest possible phase.

Corporately there is a good understanding of the challenges we face in Children's Services and a strong federated approach that sees us meet regularly with a leadership colleagues in the People Directorate and the Public Health Directorate. At the same time our work with colleagues in Economic Development in the Place Directorate have been key to achieving the level of progress and engagement with key partners in the city. Including major businesses and employers, such as Babcock, and the DWP.

At the same time, we have recently refocused on our corporate leadership commitment to ensure that we keep an active focus on ensuring we are addressing equality and diversity issues and

priorities effectively. Establishing a new and revitalised Equality and Diversity Senior Leadership Group.

These are just some of the examples that make Plymouth a great place to be a DCS. There are still many challenges ahead in the current local and national context for children's services, but Plymouth and PCC is a dynamic and outward looking place to face them.

The most rewarding and important aspects of my role has been, being part of a system that at all levels, is committed to improving outcomes and life chances for all children, young people and their families. This makes relationship and strengths-based systems leadership and practice, a reality within which to develop, learn and keep improving.

**Alison Botham**

**Director of Children's Services**