



Improvement Plan Monitoring Quarter 3

Progress Report



Overview

This report reviews our activity and progress to date against our Service Improvement Plan for Children's Social Care.

Our priorities are:

1. We **always** put children and young people **first**
2. We understand **what impact** the situation is having on the child or young person
3. We **take action** to make positive change a reality
4. We work **with** families to achieve **long lasting** change. Children and young people get the **right service** for them, at the **right time**

This report details:

- Our achievements
- Key areas for improvement
- Improvements to services
- Quality of our services
- Planned future improvements

Executive Summary

There has been an **increase in good quality practice** taking place with families. Children and young people receive the right service for their needs and are experiencing **improved outcomes** as a result of intervention.

Children, young people and parents are positive about their relationships with their workers. Children and young people's views and wishes are sought, and reflected in multi-agency meetings, assessments and plans. Families are involved in planning, and understand why they have a plan.

Considerable service improvement activity has taken place to support professionals to deliver best practice, improve multi-agency working, increase scrutiny, ensure services are child-focused, and ultimately to improve outcomes for children.

We know ourselves well, and detailed knowledge of the quality of our services and areas for improvement is supporting senior managers to effectively drive improvements. Service improvements have resulted in better quality services and improved decision making which has been confirmed through repeat audit. Significant improvements have been achieved.

Although the quality of practice continues to improve, the majority of practice requires improvement, and is not yet at the quality and consistency we want for our children and

young people. Long-lasting change is not always achieved within children's timescales, and will still have more to do to ensure our work is truly child-focused.

Large scale changes are planned to drive further improvements, including the adoption of Signs of Safety as our way of working with families. This will support our practice and our organisation to be child-focused, solution-orientated, and respectful and inclusive of families.

Achievements

Significant Improvements Achieved

- There has been an **increase in good quality practice** taking place with families. Overall judgements show **an increase in the percentage of cases considered to be good and outstanding** (42% cases), along with a 17% decrease in those cases judged to be inadequate or requiring improvement. This continues to build on the increase in good practice achieved in Q2 and shows a positive trajectory in improvements to practice.
- The Making Children Safer Conference model has been shown to support **more evidenced decision making and SMARTer Child Protection Plans**. Initial evidence suggests that this model is having a positive impact on the effectiveness of plans and is reducing the number of children and young people subject to repeat plans. Through using this model, **Child Protection IRO's, Social Workers and partners are becoming more skilled at developing effective Child Protection plans and measuring their impact on children and young people**. This demonstrates the impact that Signs of Safety practice has made to children and young people and indicates the further scope for improvements to the quality of our practice once we adopt this approach across all of our practice.
- **Children on a child protection plan for a second or subsequent time** (within 2 years) **is showing a reduction over the last quarter**, which suggests that we may now be seeing the benefit of improved planning over the last two years, resulting in more sustainable changes achieved for families.
- **Improvements made to services in response to previous themed audits has resulted in better quality services and improved decision making:**
 - Awareness raising and communication with teams and partners following a previous audit which showed inappropriate use of the category for emotional abuse has resulted in a **decrease of 10% of plans in this category**. There will be a further audit in 2017 to assess progress in this area and the appropriate use of categories.
 - **Work around strategy discussions has significantly improved. Decisions to proceed to a Strategy Discussion are more considered**. There has been a decrease in follow up strategy meetings and an increase in the proportion of cases progressing to a section 47 enquiry. The percentage of section 47s that led to an initial child protection conference has increased from 45% in Q2 to 60% in Q3. **Multi-agency involvement in Strategy Discussions has also significantly improved**; 55% of cases in September/October 2016 involved participants from at least one other agency apart from the Police, whereas in January 2016 this was true in only 12.5% of cases. This is following the considerable awareness raising work completed in response to the areas for improvement from the

IRO strategy discussion audit in January 2016. The quality of S47s and strategy discussions has improved with 63% of these being judged to be good quality

- **Performance on requests for initial health assessments within 48 hours of a child coming into care has significantly improved** from 65% in Q2 to 87% in Q3. This is from a low of 4% in Q3 last year, and is a result of significant improvement activity in this area.
- **Children receive the right service to meet their needs.** Step up and step down was appropriate for the vast majority of case (91%), and the need for a section 47 investigation was identified in all relevant cases.
- The average number of days for 2016/17 **between entering care and moving in with an adoptive family has reduced from 936 in Quarter 1 to 556 days to date** (March 2017) – a 41% reduction. The average number of days **between a placement order and match with an adoptive family has also decreased** to 66 days from 70 in Q2 and Q3. This is against a national target of 121 days so is very good performance.
- **All cases met the practice standard for the quality of case recording** in the Q3 audit, which is a significant achievement
- **Plans for cared for children are SMART (80%),** the Q3 audit demonstrated further improvement in this area.
- The percentage of **children on a plan for neglect with a completed graded care profile has increased significantly** from 43% in November 2016 to 60% in January 2017.
- **Submission of GP reports to Child Protection Conferences has significantly improved,** from 54% in Q2 to 83% for Q3 for initial conferences. This is from a low of 35% in Q4 2015/16. Reports to reviews have also improved up to 64% in Q3 from 51% in Q2, from a low of 7% in Q2 2015/16. The Named GP is driving improvements in this area with real passion and dedication which is resulting in significant improvements.
- **There were 6 good practice notifications raised to recognise good practice this quarter.**
- There has been a **significant improvement in senior management oversight of children at risk of drift and delay** leading to improvements in planning to ensure that children are safe and achieve permanency within timescales that meet their needs.

Other Achievements

- To date (March 2017) for 2016-17 **25 children have achieved permanence through adoption.**
- **Our Social Work workforce has stabilised and turnover has continued to reduce.** We have seen an increase in enquiries and applications as well as in the appointments of experienced workers, including the permanent appointment of two experienced Child Protection Managers to the Child in Need and Child Protection Team in Crewe. Crewe is now fully staffed with all permanent Team Managers.
- **Cheshire East's Social Worker Recruitment Strategy 'Where Social Work Works' received a high commendation in the Children & Young People Now Awards in November 2016.**

- Cheshire East has received **positive feedback from accommodation providers and education establishments on our care plans for unaccompanied asylum seeking children**. Prior to Christmas, Cheshire East accommodated two 17 year old girls under the Lord Dubs amendment. The girls have settled very well and are making good progress.

Key Areas for Improvement

- Although the quality of practice continues to improve, **the majority of practice still requires improvement** (51%), and is not yet at the quality and consistency we want for our children and young people
- **Too many children and young people experience drift and delay**. Some drift and delay was evident in the majority of cases (69%). Permanency needs to be a key consideration in planning from a much earlier stage, and professionals need to be clear when a lack of progress in neglect cases should result in escalation. Some children and young people experience delays around good quality assessments first time informing Legal Advice Meetings (LAM) and pre-proceedings.
- **We still have more to do to ensure our work is truly child-focused**, and the lived experience of children and young people is at the heart of all our work
- **The quality of assessments requires improvement** – assessments can be lacking in depth and analysis, and can be too descriptive, and do not always consider the parents' motivation and capacity to change. **Assessments and plans do not always evaluate or address all the known risks** within families, such as disguised compliance, which limits their ability to support sustainable change
- **Plans still need to be SMARTer, and all plans need to include clear contingencies**. **Child protection plans are not always categorised correctly**, which limits the effectiveness of the plan
- **The progress of plans is not always evaluated by the impact on the child**. In some cases professionals showed **over-optimism of parents' abilities** to create and sustain long-lasting change for their children
- There is further work to do to ensure that **all partners know what good looks like, take responsibility for outcomes for children**, and provide **effective and robust partnership challenge**
- **Use of the Graded Care Profile** to inform assessment and evaluation of progress in neglect cases remains an area for improvement for the partnership – although recent performance for January 2017 shows this has increased.
- **Multi-agency involvement in strategy discussions** has improved from previous performance but still requires further improvement
- The percentage of **initial health assessments (IHAs) completed by paediatricians** within 20 days has been at an unacceptable level for some time and continues to be so (Q3, 36%). A root cause analysis has been undertaken by both CCGs and will be reported to the LSCB Quality and Outcomes Sub Group for partnership scrutiny. There will be dedicated IHA clinics in South CCG from March 2017 (these already exist in the Eastern CCG.) A thorough analysis of all late compliance will be made by Designated Professionals in Q4. It is of note

that a number of requests were made out of area in Q3 which did affect compliance as did some delays related to arrangements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

Improvements to Services

Training to support best practice

- **Masterclasses continue to be offered on a monthly basis**, these have been well attended so far. Masterclass workshops have been held on:
 - **Assessing Parental Capacity to Change**
 - **Exercising Professional Judgement**
 - **Parenting Assessments**
- **Social Workers' confidence and skills in chairing multi agency meetings are being developed** through the 'Masterclass' offer, with the latest sessions in February and March 2017 focusing on chairing multi-agency meetings effectively, which responds to findings from the audit of core group effectiveness. **Further sessions are planned on:**
 - **Engaging with birth fathers**
 - **Permanency Planning**
 - **Children with SEND**
- **A workshop on Reflective Practice for Managers will take place in March 2017** which includes reflective supervision and developing reflective teams.
- **We have adopted the Graded Care Profile 2**, a much improved version of the graded care profile which is used to assess and evaluate the extent and impact of neglect. Initial feedback on the tool has been very positive. Training is currently being rolled out across the partnership, targeted to specific groups of practitioners in areas where there are high referrals for neglect. Since adoption in November 2016 we have trained 180 practitioners.
- **The Cared for IROs held a development day in December 2016** which was focused on engagement and direct consultation with children and young people, including young children.
- **A leadership and management session was held with Children's Social Care Managers** in February 2017 to support the development of connected leadership delivering to the service and Council priorities.
- **Two joint training workshops with Children's and Adults' social workers** will be held in March 2017 as part of celebrating World Social Work Day. These workshops will establish shared values for both services, celebrate social work practice, and support the development of good working relationships and increased integration. One session is a dedicated workshop for ASYEs.

Tools to support practitioners

- **A revised care plan document** was introduced in February 2017. This new combined document supports social workers to improve the quality and timeliness of assessments, review reports and care plans as these are all now streamlined together in one form.

- A **new pathway plan** went live in January 2017 which was developed with Social Finance.
- The LSCB will launch **assessment tools for the toxic trio** in March 2017 which will support practitioners to reflect on the lived experience of children at risk from the toxic trio, including adult focused workers. This was identified as a gap in previous LSCB audits.
- The Children with Disabilities Team has developed **guidance for social workers on the completion of the social care element of Education, Health and Care Plans** and raised awareness of responsibilities within Practice and Performance workshops. This includes specific guidance for cared for children and this is now being used across the Children with Disabilities and other social work teams
- **Good practice examples** are being collated from Cheshire East practice, including examples of effective assessments that evidence good quality analysis. These will be available on Centranet to support practitioners from April 2017.
- A new policy and procedure has been developed on **'Preparing for Adulthood'** for young people with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. This policy and procedure outlines the statutory duties placed upon the Local Authority and informs staff across the People's Directorate of their specific responsibilities towards young people aged 14-25, including a detailed reference section for tasks required for children of certain ages, and is **designed to promote the earlier development of transition planning**. The following principles are central to the policy: planning early, involving the young person and having a person-centred strengths-based approach.

Supporting effective partnership working

- **'Time to Share' workshops** are established, theme-led, discussion forums facilitated by multi-agency practitioners, who work with Cared for Children and Care Leavers. Based on a solution-focused model, the forums provide multi-agency practitioners with an opportunity to share good practice and practice issues, and discuss solutions. Some of the previous themes considered by the group include: out of area placements; resilience; relationships; our services for disabled young people; diverting our young people from offending; the cost of not being cared for; and young people with no recourse to public funds.

This forum has brought together different agencies to share good practice, such as the Children's Society, the @ct team, residential workers, fostering, therapeutic team, social workers, family support workers, housing, disability and SEN workers. This has contributed to the use of common tools to reduce criminalisation and a multi-systemic view to working with Cared For children and Care Leavers.

The group has also identified gaps in our services; a theme focussed on unaccompanied asylum seeking young people and other cared for/care leavers with no recourse to public funds identified the need for a Corporate Parenting Strategy in meeting the needs of the above. It also brought together the housing sector alongside the other professionals in finding a solution to these issues.

ASYE's and newly qualified social workers have used this forum for personal development.

The Final quarter of 2017 will see peer evaluation utilised to measure the impact of Time to Share on outcomes for cared for children and care leavers.

- **Child Protection IROs have completed training with school nurses to develop their ability and confidence to challenge**, particularly in cases where the child does not have any significant health issues and school nurses have previously felt that they have not had an active role in the plan.
- **Single agency reports to review child protection conferences were introduced in February 2017** in response to an IRO audit that highlighted issues in quality and multi-agency contribution to combined reports. A new report template has been developed which will be used for both initial and review conferences. The template has been developed in consultation with operational managers from across the partnership and it also complements the Cheshire East Making Children Safer conference model and Signs of Safety. **The quality of police reports to conference has improved significantly following challenge.**
- A process to support **good practice notifications to partners** has been developed, allowing alerts to be issued from January 2017. This will support good practice development across the partnership.
- There is ongoing activity to improve the **inclusion of multi-agency practitioners within strategy discussions** and this is supported by a work stream of the Safeguarding Children Operational Group. A Task and Finish Group has been established where they have considered the current process and obstacles in achieving multi-agency meetings. An action plan has been developed to address this including a new process for referrals to partners when a strategy meeting is called.
- **In response to the findings from the IRO audit on Core Group Effectiveness**, the LSCB Safeguarding Children Operational Group has established a task and finish group to:
 - **agree the shared roles, responsibilities and expectations of Core Group members**
 - **develop a standard agenda for Core Group meetings to provide a clear structure**
 - **develop a standard minute template to enable effective sharing of the minute taking role**

This work is currently underway. A deep dive enquiry on core group effectiveness was undertaken by the LSCB Quality and Outcomes Sub Group in February 2017 to drive improvement in this area which revealed a skill gap for practitioners in relation to chairing children's meetings. Plans are in place to meet this need through inclusion of these aspects within the current LSCB multi-agency training on child protection. The roles and responsibilities for Core Group members will be incorporated within LSCB training to embed this.
- **The LSCB Quality and Outcomes Sub Group will be undertaking deep dive investigations into partnership practice to drive service improvements.** The first of these was on core group effectiveness. The next area of focus will be neglect in May 2017, which will include the use of the screening tool and the Graded Care Profile. Single agency reports for CP conferences were introduced in February 2017 and a summary report on progress of implementation will also be submitted at the next meeting of the group in May.
- The LSCB Partnership newsletters, **Changing Practice Together**, continue to focus on key areas of practice for the partnership to communicate shared expectations on good practice. A practitioner feedback survey was carried out in December 2016 - January 2017 which has informed changes to the newsletter. The newsletter focused on listening to children and young people in November, using the right tools – for example the graded care profile,

throughout December, assessment and analysis in January, and Domestic Abuse in February and March. The themes for this newsletter going forward have been agreed to align with the LSCB priority areas and focus of the multi-agency audits, and will be Neglect for Q1, Signs of Safety and a shared culture and language in Q2, and early help and robust step up and step down in Q3.

Child-centred processes

- **A review of our processes around Public Law Proceedings is underway** to support good quality court work that achieves positive outcomes for children, and ensures decisions are made within children's timescales. An action plan has been established and is being delivered by task and finish groups. Work is expected to be completed by May 2017. **We have already received an increase in compliments with regards to our court work from court, CAFCASS and legal services.**

"I do believe that the successful reunification of A was mainly due to the allocated social worker, who I believe worked tirelessly with the couple. The support plan prepared was highly detailed and provided for the family to have continued professional support in order to maintain the placement was in A's best interest"

Part of this work will involve the introduction of 'Lessons Learned' meetings between children's social care and legal services. These meetings will review key cases where the outcome we expected in court was not achieved, as well as identify learning and any areas for improvement.

In addition, the court tracker has been updated and now includes dashboard information that is able to track workload across the teams, timeliness and outcomes for children subject to the PLO process. Through close cooperation with the legal department, **timely notifications and sharing of court documents and orders has now much improved.**

- **Our offer to Care Leavers has been refreshed and is set out in the Care Leavers' Policy.**

Robust scrutiny and drive for improvement

- **Increased scrutiny has been put in place to drive improved outcomes for children who are at risk of drift and delay.** All children who have been on Child Protection Plans for over 12 months, are subject to repeat CP planning, or have been involved in the pre-proceedings process for over 6 months are reviewed by a Service Manager or Head of Service on a monthly basis. The expectation is that the number of children within these categories will reduce significantly over the next three months as a result of this increased focus. More robust systems for identifying children and young people at risk of drift and delay will be developed to support early identification and action.

As a result of this increased management oversight, **a number of children who were not achieving positive outcomes in a timely way now have clear plans in place with appropriate timescales.** This has caused an increase in applications to Court and, although

this is anticipated to continue for the next three months, numbers should then reduce to expected levels.

- **All children with two or more placements are now tracked and monitored at the Permanence Tracking Panel** to ensure we achieve permanency and placement stability for these children. A placement stability working group has also been established with Head of Service oversight to review the issue and identify solutions.
- **Children Causing Concern** is a relatively new panel whose purpose is to track children and young people who have 3 or more placement moves, low school attendance or are young offenders. The aim being that by identifying some of the children who may not have complex or high costs but are meeting some of the indicators that we know are likely to lead to poor outcomes – such as low educational attainment and becoming NEET – that we can better understand some of the contributors to these issues and find ways to address them.
- A **draft new Children's Social Care Audit Tool** has been approved by Heads of Service across Children's Social Care in anticipation of the introduction of the Signs of Safety model. The audit tool is intended to be used for all audit streams, in particular those undertaken by Team Managers and for Social Care Practice Audits. It will continue the emphasis of change away from quantifying compliance to judging the quality of our interventions and our impact on children and young people. It is currently being piloted and will be refined following feedback.
- **Independent Auditors are continuing to work with Team Managers to support a coaching approach and ensure Team Management audits are fully embedded.**
- The **LSCB Multi-agency Audit Process** has also been reviewed. There will be three LSCB multi-agency audits each year based on agreed themes, with a 12 month follow up to evaluate progress. The next themed audit is to be on Neglect in preparation for the possible JTAI and to support the launch of the Neglect Strategy 2017-19. Subsequent LSCB multi-agency audits will be:
 - June 2017 – Child Protection Conferences
 - October 2017 – Effectiveness of the Integrated Front Door, including Early Help
 - February 2018 – Neglect
- **The CAF partnership audit process has been redesigned** using Norfolk's Signs of Safety audit process. This was considered by the LSCB Early Help Group in February 2017 and audits will take place in March/April 2017. As this becomes embedded the audit streams will be brought together to provide evidence of the quality of practice irrespective of where in the system the child receives a service.
- A **deep dive investigation on children seen within 10 days of the assessment** has been completed to understand and address areas for improvement. It showed that the timeliness of children seen was 77-79%. A more accurate performance report has now been developed and this information will be included in Performance Challenge so this figure can be further improved.
- **Performance Challenge Sessions have been reviewed** and there are plans for the Child in Need and Child Protection Teams and the Safeguarding Unit to have joint sessions that will enable a focus on the progress of individual children and families.

- A **Supervision Tracker** is now in place to monitor the frequency of social workers' supervisions, which can be challenged through the Performance Challenge Sessions. Supervision audits are being completed on a quarterly basis to monitor and inform improvements to the quality of supervision
- **Our offer to care leavers beyond 21 years is now supported on Liquid Logic.** The Business Intelligence Team are currently producing reports against this offer so we can monitor and evidence our provision.

Co-producing services with children and young people

- **Ignition** is an innovative project that has been established to support young people to have the best, most appropriate transition for when they leave care. It is available to young people aged over 15½ years who are thinking about where and how they would like to live when they leave care. Once a referral is made the details are passed to Voice for Children or Crewe YMCA who each have identified people who will meet with the young person to discuss their aspirations. A panel discussion will take place incorporating these views, which the young person is welcome to attend, and an action plan is developed, that will help the young person to achieve their future living goals.
- **New in 2017, there is a pre-arranged Children's Society 'drop in' at Cledford House to speak to staff about cared for children's views raised within the Children in Care Council.** The Team Manager for the Care Leavers' Service has now attended the Care Leavers Forum twice in the past six months to obtain their views on services. Over 2017 a survey will be undertaken to obtain feedback from all care leavers we are working with.
- A **shadow Young People's Committee** for the Corporate Parenting Committee has been established to increase the participation of cared for children and care leavers in developing services and the operation of the Committee. Both the Corporate Parenting Committee Chair and Vice Chair attended the first shadow committee meeting in January 2017.
- **Work has been completed with young people to better understand neglect from their perspective,** and their views have shaped the development of the neglect communication campaign.
- **Standardised tools that will support IRO scrutiny of the quality of consultation with children, young people, parents and carers** when managing risk plans at trigger Level 1 and Level 2 missing from home and care meetings have been developed and are currently under consultation with a group of young people.

Strategic developments

- **Our regional foster carer recruitment campaign called 'You Can Foster' launched in September 2016.** The theme of the campaign was 'Ambition' focussing on the important role foster carers play in supporting children and young people and helping them to realise their dreams. The campaign has featured on regional TV and radio as well as online via social media channels such as Facebook. Cheshire East also launched a new 'Net Natives' campaign in October 2016, which generated new enquires. Work is being undertaken to

improve the progression of enquiries, the Fostering Team are working closely with the other regional teams.

- Discussions have commenced with regional partners (Cheshire West and Chester, Warrington and Halton) to identify **opportunities for fostering services to work together** on key areas. The aim is to increase our ability to compete with private sector providers whilst also seeking efficiencies in how services are provided. The proposals being considered focus on the following key areas in the first phase:
 - Fostering recruitment - shared referral / front door services
 - Marketing - shared strategies and media work
 - Training of foster carers - access to pooled training programmes
- **Work-streams have been created around the Care Leavers Strategy** to focus on improving outcomes in the key areas of Education, Health, Independence, Financial Stability and Housing. Champion Personal Advisor roles are being created to take the lead in these areas and they will work closely with the Team Manager to co-ordinate the work streams, develop resources, produce a quarterly report and work closely with care leavers so focus of the work is shaped by their needs and their feedback.

Care Leavers are also being allocated with a Personal Advisor at an earlier time compared to last year as more resources are available to meet the growing demands of the service. Work has been undertaken to raise the profile of work with Care Leavers; staff have delivered a number of presentations about the service at the Practice and Performance Workshops, Fostering Forum and to the 'Skills for Fostering' training programme. These events were all well received.

- **The CCGs have commissioned research into children's emotional and mental health needs at the point of placement** with the aim of ensuring that children placed for adoption in Cheshire East receive appropriate services in relation to their emotional and mental health. The report which has recently been published will be reported to the Health and Wellbeing Board and actions required are being developed in conjunction with the Cheshire East Adoption Team.
- **The Child Protection Information Sharing Project (CP-IS) has gone live in Cheshire East.** This is a nationwide system that enables child protection information to be shared securely between local authorities and NHS trusts across England. This project will improve our information sharing with partners. Sharing information effectively across health and care settings is vital in protecting vulnerable children and young people to prevent further harm. CP-IS connects Liquid Logic with systems used by NHS unscheduled care settings, such as Accident and Emergency, walk-in centres and maternity units. It helps ensure that health and care professionals are notified when a child or unborn baby with a child protection plan or cared for child is treated.
- **Work to support Signs of Safety implementation is well underway:**
 - **Governance arrangements** to support implementation have been agreed, and the Signs of Safety Project Board was established in January 2017. This board is meeting monthly initially to ensure arrangements are in place for implementation. Members of the Practice Champions Group have been identified to support the work streams and ensure service development is driven and owned by those closest to the practice.
 - **Engagement with key stakeholders** has taken place, including but not limited to the key children's partnership boards, Practice Champions, children's social care staff within

Practice and Performance Workshops, Children's Social Care Management meetings and early help team development sessions. A newsletter on the bid and Signs of Safety FAQ was released to all Children and Families staff in January 2017. Continued communication and engagement activity has been planned by the Project Board.

- The **LSCB are committed to adopting the approach as a whole partnership culture** and way of working with families. The LSCB will be included within the development of the strategic plan and within the initial leadership briefings. A report on culture and leadership will go to the Board in May 2017.
- **Research and engagement with other LAs** that have adopted Signs of Safety has been undertaken. A visit to North Yorkshire who have fully embedded Signs of Safety across their services, and are a member of the DfE's Partners in Practice scheme, will be completed in April to observe their services and understand what support they can offer us under this scheme.
- **The membership of the Practice Champions Group has been fully refreshed** to ensure that it consists of those people who are keen to lead, develop and drive service development with enthusiasm. Skills and interests in the different work streams for this group were canvassed in January 2017.
- **'Project Macc'** will be launched in April 2017 which will mirror our successful Project Crewe service, working intensively with low level children in need cases to achieve sustainable change for families. Project Macc and Project Crewe will be co-located within the Child in Need and Child Protection Teams to promote effective working relationships.

Recruitment and Retention

- **Turnover has continued to reduce and the workforce has stabilised.** This has allowed us to cease our programme of rolling recruitment and move to a more targeted approach as individual vacancies in the service arise.
- There has been **an increase in enquiries and applications as well as in the appointments of experienced workers.** In 2016 we recruited 18 permanent full-time social workers, 11 of these had practised elsewhere, and of these, 7 joined our Child Protection Teams.
- In addition, **we have appointed four Supervising Social Workers to the Fostering Service and two Social Workers to the Emergency Duty Team.**
- **The permanent appointment of two experienced Child Protection Managers to the Child in Need and Child Protection Team in Crewe has also had a significant impact on stability and morale.** All permanent Team Manager posts in Crewe are now filled.
- Feedback about our recruitment activity continues to be positive and we received wider recognition in a **high commendation at the Children & Young People Now Annual Awards** in the category of Recruitment and Professional Development.
- On-going activity includes a continued focus on advertising through social media to support our recruitment programme, keeping the recruitment microsite up-to-date, **participation in two Government schemes to attract and assist people into careers in social work**, and the establishment of an Advanced Practitioner role.

- We have joined the **North-West Midlands Social Work Teaching Partnership**, which is coordinated through Keele University, and we anticipate this will assist our recruitment programme as well as offer opportunities to better support existing employees with their continuing professional development.
- **Securing the whole IRO team in permanent posts**, which has been one of the team's strategic targets, directly linked to children benefitting from stable, reliable, trusting relationships with their IROs, is becoming a reality now.

Quality of Services

What our performance tells us

- **Performance on requests for initial health assessments within 48 hours of a child coming into care has significantly improved** from 65% in Q2 to 87% in Q3. This is from a low of 4% in Q3 last year, and is a result of significant improvement activity in this area.
- The percentage of **children on a plan for neglect with a completed graded care profile has increased significantly** from 43% in November 2016 to 60% in January 2017.
- **Submission of GP reports to Child Protection Conferences has significantly improved**, from 54% in Q2 to 83% for Q3 for initial conferences. This is from a low of 35% in Q4 2015/16. Reports to reviews have also improved up to 64% in Q3 from 51% in Q2, from a low of 7% in Q2 2015/16. The Named GP is driving improvements in this area with real passion and dedication which is resulting in significant improvements. GPs have also recently received training from the IRO's in January 2017 to increase awareness of their safeguarding responsibilities and develop good working relationships.
- **Children and young people's views continue to be heard at conference (99%)** – performance on this measure continues to be strong
- **Parents and carers are attending conferences** (100% of initial conferences and 93% of reviews)
- **The average caseload for social workers has reduced from 23 in Q2 to 19 in Q3**
- **Initial and Review Conferences and Cared for reviews are completed within timescale**

However:

- **Too many children have been on a Child Protection plan for an extended period** – 31 have been on a plan for more than 15 months. This is due to some large families (65% of these young people are from just 6 families out of a total of 17 families) - however this is still too high. Support for these children is closely scrutinised to ensure the appropriate action is being taken and increased senior management scrutiny has been put in place which expected to achieve a significant reduction in the number of children on plans for an extended time.
- The percentage of **initial health assessments (IHAs) completed by paediatricians** within 20 days has been at an unacceptable level for some time and continues to be so (Q3, 36%). A root cause analysis has been undertaken by both CCGs and will be reported to the LSCB Quality and Outcomes Sub Group for partnership scrutiny. There will be dedicated IHA

clinics in South CCG from March 2017 (these already exist in the Eastern CCG.) A thorough analysis of all late compliance will be made by Designated Professionals in Q4. It is of note that a number of requests were made out of area in Q3 which did affect compliance as did some delays related to arrangements for unaccompanied asylum seeking children (UASC).

- There has been a **decrease in the number of assessments completed within 15, 35 and 45 days** during January 2017. Despite an increase in the percentage of assessments completed within 15 days from 26% in September 2016 to 37% in December 2016, suggesting we are making more timely and focused decisions and putting in an appropriate support package as soon as possible, this has decreased in January 2017 to 19%. The overall year to date position for assessments completed within 35 days has nevertheless increased to 70% and the completion rate within 45 days remains high; 84% in January 2017 and 85% in the year to date.

Please see our Improvement Plan Performance Scorecard for all the performance and audit measures for our progress.

What audit and quality assurance reports tell us

- Children and young people are experiencing **improved outcomes** as a result of intervention (90%)
- There has been an **increase in good quality practice** taking place with families. Overall judgements show **an increase in the percentage of cases considered to be good and outstanding** (42% cases) along with a 17% decrease in those cases judged to be inadequate or requiring improvement. This continues to build on the increase in good practice achieved in Q2 and shows a positive trajectory in improvements to practice.
- **Identification, challenge and timely response to concerns were evident. Social workers are effectively identifying and challenging safeguarding concerns** (92%), and taking **the right action at the right time to protect children** (88%).
- **Children and young people's views and wishes are sought**, and reflected in multi-agency meetings, assessments and plans
- **Families are involved in planning**, and understand why they have a plan. Views of absent parents are sought
- **Children and young people receive the right service for their needs.** Step up and step down was appropriate for the vast majority of case (91%), and the need for a section 47 investigation was identified in all relevant cases
- **There is good quality work at the front door.** 50% work was good quality. Decision making is sound (100%), informed by information from partners (70%) and family history (100%), and result in the right outcome for children (90%).
- **Managers are scrutinising work** and driving improved outcomes for children. Management decision making met the Practice Standard for all cases within ChECS and Permanence and Throughcare, and 67% CIN/CP cases.
- **All cases met the practice standard for recording** – which is a significant achievement

- **Plans for cared for children are SMART (80%)** – audit has demonstrated further improvement in this area.
- **Work around strategy discussions has significantly improved. Decisions to proceed to a Strategy Discussion are more considered.** There has been a decrease in follow up strategy meetings and an increase in the proportion of cases progressing to a S47 enquiry. The percentage of section 47s that led to an initial child protection conference has increased from 45% in Q2 to 60% in Q3. **Multi-agency involvement in Strategy Discussions has also significantly improved;** 55% of cases in September/October 2016 involved participants from at least one other agency apart from the Police, whereas in January 2016 this was true in only 12.5% of cases. This is following the considerable awareness raising work completed in response to the areas for improvement from the IRO strategy discussion audit in January 2016. The quality of S47s and strategy discussions has improved with 63% of these being judged to be good quality
- An evaluation of our Child Protection Conference model, 'Making Children Safer', was completed in August 2016. **The model has received positive feedback from both parents and professionals; conferences are more risk focussed, with an emphasis on planning** rather than information sharing, the quality of parent and child participation has increased, plans are becoming SMARTer, the child's lived experience and the impact of the child protection plan is more easily identifiable, and decisions within conference are therefore more evidence based. Initial evidence indicates that use of this model may be reducing repeat plans.

However:

- Although the quality of practice continues to improve, **the majority of practice still requires improvement** (51%), and is not yet at the quality and consistency we want for our children and young people
- **Too many children and young people experience drift and delay.** Some drift and delay was evident in the majority of cases (69%). Permanency needs to be a key consideration in planning from a much earlier stage, and professionals need to be clear when a lack of progress in neglect cases should result in escalation. Some children and young people experience delays around Legal Advice Meetings (LAM) and pre-proceedings.
- **We still have more to do to ensure our work is truly child-focused,** and the lived experience of children and young people is at the heart of all our work
- **The quality of assessments requires improvement** – assessments can be lacking in depth and analysis, and can be too descriptive, and do not always consider the parents' motivation and capacity to change. **Assessments and plans do not always evaluate or address all the known risks** within families, such as disguised compliance, which limits their ability to support sustainable change
- **Plans still need to be SMARTer, and all plans need to include clear contingencies. Child protection plans are not always categorised correctly,** which limits the effectiveness of the plan
- **The progress of plans is not always evaluated by the impact on the child.** In some cases professionals showed **over-optimism of parents' abilities** to create and sustain long-lasting change for their children

- There is further work to do to ensure that **all partners know what good looks like, take responsibility for outcomes for children**, and provide **effective and robust partnership challenge**
- **Use of the Graded Care Profile** to inform assessment and evaluation of progress in neglect cases remains an area for improvement for the partnership – although recent performance for January 2017 shows this has increased.
- There is still work to do with regards to the **timeliness of initial child protection conferences**, although there is an improving picture. In October 2016, 54% of initial conferences were held within the 15 working days and this had increased to 94% in November and 100% in December, but has dropped back to 83% in January 2017.
- **Multi-agency involvement in strategy discussions** has improved from previous performance but still requires further improvement

For more detail please see the supporting audit summary report.

What children, young people, parents and carers tell us

- Children, young people and parents' views are sought through our audits. **Children, young people and parents are positive about their relationships with their workers.** They value the openness and honesty of workers, and identified good examples of when their workers were open and honest with them. They reported that they were aware of the reasons for social care involvement and were kept informed for what actions were being taken. Social workers visited often, and families were able to attend and contribute to meetings and plans. Plans were clear about what was expected of them and the professionals involved, and were regularly reviewed to help to keep everyone on track.
- **Families feel supported and listened to by their social workers.** There were 26 Child in Need Feedback Surveys completed and returned this quarter, which contained positive feedback about family's experiences and the support they received (figures represent those who agreed or strongly agreed):
 - **100% said their Social Worker was easy to talk to and understood their situation**
 - **92% said that their Social Worker listened to their views**, with 93% feeling they were given opportunity to share their views when attending meetings
 - **96% felt their Social Worker was reliable and did what they said they would do**
 - **77% felt the CiN Plan had helped them and their family**

"Getting people to understand how hard days can be is hard. I understand why you were called but fear no-one is listening to us"

Conference model. 93% rated the conferences as good or outstanding. 98% said the conference had increased their understanding of the concerns.

"I was always listened to and got to explain problems/ issues etc."

• **Parents were very positive about the Making Children Safer**

"This was great and less intimidating"

- **Adoption Panels are working well.** Feedback from Adopters and Prospective Adopters attending Adoption Panels was that staff were welcoming, as was the venue, that their views were taken into account, and that panel members were engaged and interested in what they had to say. **In the last 6 months, all the feedback survey responses have been wholly positive.**
- **29 complaints were received this quarter** which is consistent with previous performance. Complaints from parents are carers covered the following areas which are consistent with previous quarters:
 - Factual errors and inaccuracies in assessments
 - Phone calls not returned, and a lack of communication
 - Reduction in Special Guardianship Allowance
 - The content of assessments
 - Issues with contact arrangements and lack of contact with their children
- **9 compliments were received** from parents, grandparents, foster carers, a teacher, a child's guardian and a thank you card from two children to their social worker.

"The professionalism I have been shown was exemplary"
Parent

"Thank you for all your help and getting us happy again"
Two children to their social worker

What our staff and partners tell us

- **Children's Social Care practitioners were asked for their views on our services** and adopting Signs of Safety in Practice and Performance Workshops in September 2016 under the Signs of Safety three houses model, which is summarised overleaf. This confirms what we know through audit and other quality assurance information, that practice is increasingly good, multi-agency challenge has increased, that staff value the support from their managers, and teams are increasing stable. It also reflects that practitioners share the same aspirations for children and young people and our service.
- **Feedback from 563 partners on the Making Children Safer model has been overwhelming positive** – all of them rated them good (47%) or outstanding (53%)

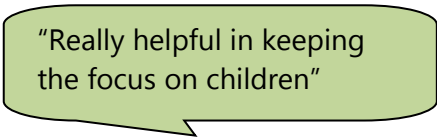
"Well organised, clear, thorough and very collaborative. Also allowed for warmth/ humanity to enable engagement with young people – not often done. Great!"

"This is by far the best CP conference I have attended"

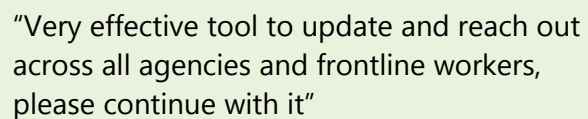
- **Adoption Panels are working well.** Attending Social Workers from Cheshire East and external Adoption Agencies reported that panel members had clearly read paperwork and asked relevant questions, that the panel itself ran smoothly and that all were made to feel welcome and that their contribution was valued.
- Practitioners' views on the Changing Practice Together newsletter were sought through a feedback survey which was carried in December 2016-January 2017. A total of 109

responses were received. The majority of the comments were positive, most people reported that they found the newsletter informative and useful to their practice:

- **56% respondents said they had reflected on their practice** as a result of the newsletter, and **just under a quarter of respondents, 23%, reported having changed their practice as a result of the newsletter**
- 78% of respondents stated that the Newsletter is "relevant" or "very relevant" to their organisation
- Examples practitioners gave of how they had changed their practice included:
 - "involving the 'absent parent' more, particularly fathers"
 - "making sure my plans are SMART"
 - "go back over the voice of the child before completing assessments. Review with child more frequently"
 - "offering rationale in my record keeping for decisions made"



"Really helpful in keeping the focus on children"



"Very effective tool to update and reach out across all agencies and frontline workers, please continue with it"

Feedback from Practitioners in Children's Social Care

What we want to improve	What's working well	Our dream service
<p>More time to build quality relationships with families</p> <p>We want to make sure we have the tools and support to make Signs of Safety a Success. ICT infrastructure needs to support our practice</p> <p>Want to make sure partners buy into Signs of Safety and get a common understanding and approach across all professionals</p> <p>Workload – worried about additional demands due to changes to services</p> <p>Paperwork needs to be more child-friendly. We need to reduce duplication in recording</p> <p>Recruitment and retention</p> <p>Partners need to have shared responsibility</p> <p>Step down – need clear guidance and thresholds for professionals. Partner agencies want us to hold cases for longer instead of stepping them down</p> <p>Some people won't embrace the possibility that there are other ways of practising</p>	<p>We are achieving better outcomes for children and we are keeping children safe. Children are being adopted/achieving permanence quicker</p> <p>Children's voices are heard – good engagement with children, young people, parents and carers, good direct work with children.</p> <p>Children give positive feedback about their social workers - fewer complaints and more compliments. CP conferences are working better – feedback from parents is positive</p> <p>Quality of practice is improving. Pride in what we've already achieved on our improvement journey – we identify what's working well. More clear, concise and succinct CP Plans</p> <p>Our culture is child focused - people work hard and go the extra mile for children and young people. People aren't set in their ways – flexible and innovative workforce. Culture of improvement</p> <p>Management support and visibility. Open door policy. Can offload worries safely with managers and colleagues. Senior management is visible.</p> <p>Pod approach – Family support worker and social worker roles. Better collaborative working between teams. Multi-agency working has improved – willingness to challenge and change</p> <p>Simplification of assessments – now there is less repetition. Electronic record working to improve processes and quality.</p> <p>Services: Children's Disability Team, @ct team, Project Crewe, Foster to adopt, dedicated PA for NEET, DAFSU, range of additional support services for families, good EDT, Front door – fast response, Operation encompass</p> <p>Good training and learning opportunities</p> <p>Signs of Safety - glad to be investing in this as a whole service approach</p> <p>Workloads - Caseloads reducing. Recruitment and retention of permanent staff and managers - increased team stability. Staff turnover is decreasing – people want to come and work for Cheshire East Council. Massive improvement in Crewe CIN/CP – feels calm and a positive place to work</p>	<p>Outstanding and sustainable outcomes achieved for children and young people and families. Children are safe at home with their families. Less children in care, at child protection, children in need and in the criminal justice system</p> <p>Families understand why there is intervention and what we want to achieve. Individuals feel valued, listened to, and involved in their plans. Families take ownership of their own plan. Involve families as much as possible in identifying what works</p> <p>Improved life choices for children with disabilities on a long term basis and moving into adulthood</p> <p>Our Workforce and culture is driven by the needs of children and young people (not staff). Confident workforce. Positivity on all levels – embracing opportunity.</p> <p>Consistency for children and families - building more trusting relationships. Experienced and stable workforce. Happy workforce - no stress. Spending more time with families.</p> <p>Cheshire East leads other authorities in terms of best practice</p> <p>Wholesale responsibility and ownership from all agencies. Consistency across services. Collective decisions Focused and structured work. Efficient service. Locality working</p> <p>Good early help</p> <p>Good quality supervision and management</p> <p>Good quality training for everyone across teams</p>

Planned Future Improvements

- The **LSCB Neglect Sub Group is working on a new Neglect Strategy 2017-19** and this will be launched in April 2017 alongside a communication campaign which has been developed with young people. The 'Act on Neglect' Campaign will launch across the partnership and in universal settings to increase the identification and response to neglect, particularly where it is less recognised, for example in adolescents.
- A **Neglect Operational Group will be piloted** whereby practitioners can share concerns and advice on neglect cases.
- An **analysis of Child in Need cases** is currently underway through an audit of assessments that had an outcome of no further action and re-referrals. This is due to be completed by the end of March 2017 and will inform our demand management strategy.
- **Private Fostering policies and procedures are currently being reviewed** and are on track to be completed by June 2017. Work is currently underway to streamline the processes within the children's record system, which is expected to be completed by March 2017.
- **The Early Help Strategy and needs analysis** are being developed and the drafts were considered by the LSCB Early Help Sub Group in February 2017. CAF Audits are due to be relaunched in March 2017.
- Plans are progressing as expected for Cheshire East to move into the **Regional Adoption Agency**, which should be operational from April 2017. 'Adoption Counts' has been agreed as the name for the Regional Adoption Agency and branding is currently being prepared. Strong family finding processes have been mapped to ensure good, effective care planning from the earliest point is realised.
- A **new team structure for the Integrated Front-Door has been designed and new processes agreed** in line with the Business Improvement Review completed in December 2016. Staff consultation on the changes is due to take place during March 2017 with full implementation by May 2017.
- **Bespoke management training for Team Managers** is being developed to ensure they have the skills and knowledge they need to support, inspire and challenge their teams to always put children and young people first and this is to be rolled out in two sessions to be held in April and June 2017.
- **We will be adopting Signs of Safety** to ensure all our practice and our organisation is child-focused, solution orientated, and respectful and inclusive of families.
- Workshops are planned during 2016/2017 to support our workforce to achieve **high quality referral requests and clear and concise Individual Placement Agreements** for our children and young people. The IPA is the only legally binding document the local authority has with the provider that specifies agreed outcomes and financial detail such as pocket money and savings. Being clear at the start of the placement about what is expected to be achieved ensures everyone knows what they are working towards.
- Cheshire East has joined an innovation bid with Stoke to run **the 'House Project'**; this involves setting up a company with children in care and care leavers to recycle derelict houses and is intended to develop young people's ownership and participation skills.

- A project is being undertaken during 2016-17 in relation to the **emotional and mental health needs of Cared for Children**. This project will involve the participation of Cared for Children in activities related to positive mental health and in a multi-agency conference in spring 2017. This project is important in giving children a voice and raising the awareness of multi-agency managers, practitioners, councillors and carers regarding the emotional and mental health needs of Cared for Children.
- **Placement stability is an area of focus** as there appears to be a growing number of children who are experiencing three or more placements in the course of a year. A cross service working group has been established to identify themes for learning and development. The issue is also being addressed through the Permanence Tracking Panel and has added to the forward plan for our Social Care Leadership Team.