

Children and Families Committee

Supplementary Agenda

Date: Monday, 8th July, 2024
Time: 2.00 pm
Venue: Council Chamber, Municipal Buildings, Earle Street, Crewe
CW1 2BJ

5. **ILACS Improvement Plan** (Pages 3 - 58)

To consider the appendices which were marked to follow on the agenda.

Membership: Councillors R Bailey, M Beanland, S Bennett-Wake, J Bird, C Bulman (Chair), N Cook, M Edwards, E Gilman (Vice-Chair), G Hayes, B Posnett, B Puddicombe, J Saunders and G Smith

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Children's Services Improvement Plan

April 2024 – March 2025

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Introduction

This is our action plan to address the findings from the Ofsted inspection of children's services in Cheshire East which took place in February and March 2024. The findings from the inspection are available in a report on the [Ofsted website](#). The inspection gave Cheshire East's children's services an overall grading of inadequate and found that although some improvements had been made since our last inspection in 2019, the quality of practice and the experience and progress of children and young people was too variable, and for care leavers this was inadequate. We need to make significant improvements and this plan sets out how we will do this.

We are committed to improving outcomes for children and young people. We will use the inspection findings to continue to improve the support we offer. This plan responds to all the areas identified in the inspection report. Immediate action was taken to improve services, starting during the inspection, and this is reflected in the plan alongside longer-term actions and ambitions.

Through the delivery of our plan and our programme of improvement, we will continue to embed a culture of high support and high challenge and be a **child-focused** organisation that works together **with** people, through effective relationships that support positive change. We know our workforce is our most important asset and we will continue to support and regularly communicate with frontline practitioners and managers so everyone understands their role in improvement and we co-produce, deliver, evaluate and celebrate changes together.

Context

This inspection, and previous inspections, have shown that Cheshire East's children's services have not provided consistently good quality support to our children and young people. We were judged inadequate in 2013 and 2024. In developing this plan, we have critically considered what barriers have prevented us from achieving good quality services to date. We have recognised that in the past we have moved from fixing problem to problem, which has led to a 'stop/start' approach. We now need to embed a systemic approach to improvement; changing our culture, developing the right systems and processes to ensure we routinely evaluate impact, and holding our shape around the changes we expect to see – holding the right people accountable consistently at every level.

We will be reviewing and changing our services in line with the [children's social care national framework](#) to ensure that we deliver consistently good quality practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.

Cheshire East Council, like councils across the country, has been experiencing unprecedented financial pressures. In February 2024, the council approved a balanced budget for 2024/25, which included spending money from reserves to cover the impact of additional financial pressures. The level of reserves is now insufficient to adequately protect the council against future risks. Forecasts indicate there is four-year funding gap of £100m to balance the budget and hold an appropriate level of reserves.

Alongside the improvement programme in children's services, Cheshire East Council has embarked on a significant transformation programme. The council-wide transformation plan will aim to address the funding gap and will be submitted to the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) as part of the criteria for exceptional financial support from the government.

We calculate that additional investment will be required to support children's services to deliver our improvement plan at pace. A costed

proposal for additional capacity and expertise to support improvement will be received by the Children and Families Committee in July 2024.

Challenges for children's services are challenges for the whole council, and there is whole-council commitment and support for delivering this plan. This improvement plan is part of the council's transformation and has been informed by the findings from the LGA corporate peer review in March 2024.

The council's transformation plan will also support us to achieve our improvement plan. Cheshire East Council's transformation will include changes to the organisation's culture, embedding high standards and effective challenge and performance management where these are not met, focusing on outcomes, not process. These messages will be echoed through our children's leadership and management programme.

The council's transformational plan will also support improved working between council services and improve the support to services from enablers.

This plan also feeds into our wider strategy for developing the council's children's services, the Together Strategy, which has the following building blocks:

- **Together supporting and enabling our workforce:** we have the right people, with the right skills and support to improve the outcomes of our children and young people
- **Together connecting as one team:** we work as one team across children and adult services with shared skills, processes and communication to focus on the needs and experiences of children, young people and their families
- **Together improving and innovating our services:** our children, young people and their families have consistently good/ outstanding experiences of our services
- **Together collaborating with our families, colleagues and partners:** we adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering our services help to shape them.

Coproduction

In Cheshire East, we aim to work [TOGETHER](#) and adopt an 'experts by experience' approach that ensures that those receiving or delivering services help to shape them.

We will engage children and young people throughout our improvement journey in developing and delivering improvements. Children and young people's views will influence our delivery on a child, service, and strategic level. We are developing a new Corporate Parent Working Group that will include care experienced young people as key members of the board. Young people will be involved in shaping and evaluating services through the Corporate Parent Working Group, our young people's participation groups, through our audits, young people's surveys, and the local offer app.

We will also continue to engage with practitioners and managers within our frontline teams to ensure we are all delivering improvements together, and we will ensure their feedback, and feedback from our partners, informs our evaluation of impact.

Support and Challenge

We are committed to delivering this plan and achieving consistently good and better services that achieve strong outcomes for children and young people. We know that we cannot deliver this plan alone, and that we need to work together with our children, young people and families, with our teams, across the partnership and throughout the council.

Throughout the development of the plan, we have engaged with frontline practitioners and managers on the inspection findings and what support they need moving forwards, and we will continue to engage with our workforce throughout the delivery of the plan to ensure we are all on this journey together.

This plan has been developed together with and provided with scrutiny and challenge by:

- service managers and service leads, including partners
- the children’s social care leadership team
- the children’s services leadership team
- the council’s leadership team
- the Safeguarding Children’s Partnership
- the Improvement and Impact Board
- elected members on the Children and Families Committee and Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee.

The final plan will be endorsed by full Council.

We will continue to invest in our workforce through training, development, and management and leadership support and challenge. Training has been tailored to the areas for improvement raised during the inspection and will continue to be responsive to development needs throughout the year as identified in quality assurance and monitoring activity. This includes a bespoke leadership programme for all leaders within children’s services to embed a culture of high support and high challenge, and embedding restorative practice as our practice model so we build strong relationships that support effective change. The impact of training and support on practice will continue to be evaluated through the delivery of this plan so we can adapt and respond to areas for improvement.

We will also seek to ‘infect our system’ with good practice by collecting and sharing examples of good practice with teams.

We also recognise the enormous value from learning from other areas. We are currently working with Stockport through the sector led improvement programme (SLIP) around restorative practice, and we are looking at how we can tailor this support to help to address the inspection findings. We have reviewed successful improvement plans in other areas and sought advice from other authorities and external bodies with specialist expertise, including the LGA and DfE, to support the development of this plan and will continue to use these sources throughout our improvement journey. We will

continue to learn from innovative and best practice in other areas to improve our offer for children and young people in Cheshire East, for example Lincolnshire’s apprenticeship scheme for care leavers.

Monitoring Impact

The first chapter of the plan is structured under the seven areas for improvement highlighted in the 2024 Ofsted inspection report. It starts with senior manager oversight, to ensure this drives continuous improvement, followed by care leavers, as this is the area requiring the greatest improvement. The second chapter considers the additional areas for development from the inspection report.

The plan sets out the actions we will take to improve services. What is most important is that what we do makes a difference, so each month we will report on impact against the inspection findings. Progress against actions and impact against the inspection findings will be rated using the following:

Actions

Colour	Definition
Grey	Action not started yet, no risk to implementation anticipated
Red	Action not on track, risk to implementation
Amber	Action progressing, some issues but realistic plans in place to recover
Green	Action not yet completed, but on track to be completed within timescales
Blue	Action completed

Impact

Colour	Definition
Grey	Too early to measure impact
Red	No impact or very limited impact / improving outcomes for a few children and young people
Amber	Some positive impact but this is variable and does not consistently improve outcomes for children and young people
Green	Mostly positive and consistent impact which delivers improved outcomes for children and young people
Blue	Achieves consistently good and better impact that delivers improved outcomes for children and young people

Each section of the plan has a dedicated senior leader who is responsible for achieving and reporting on impact. The sources we will use to assess our impact for each area of the plan are outlined in each section. These include:

- Seeking and listening to children and young people's experiences
- Single agency and multi-agency audits
- Performance indicators
- Listening to practitioners and managers, including within partner agencies
- Recruitment and retention information.

Our impact on work with children and young people will also be evaluated through Ofsted monitoring visits.

The plan will be a live and responsive plan, so will adapt to incorporate new actions as needed. The plan covers the activity we will carry out over a 12-month period from April 2024 to March 2025. A new plan will be developed after this plan is completed for the period from April 2025 onwards.

The improvement plan will be supported by individual service plans which set out all the key activity required to continue to develop services.

Governance and Accountability

Progress against the plan will be driven by senior leaders and will be assessed and monitored through usual management arrangements including senior management meetings and supervision.

The Corporate Parent Working Group will drive developments for cared for children and care leavers, and so will contribute to delivering improvements in relation to the inspection findings.

An independently chaired Improvement and Impact Board will formally scrutinise progress and impact monthly. Key members of the Safeguarding Children's Partnership and the council's senior leadership team are members of the Improvement and Impact Board.

The Safeguarding Children's Partnership will receive six monthly updates on progress enabling all members to scrutinise and challenge progress.

The Children and Families Committee will scrutinise impact against the plan at every committee meeting.

The Cared for Children and Care Leavers Committee will scrutinise progress pertinent to care experienced young people and will receive reports on the work of the Corporate Parent Working Group and its impact on improving outcomes for these young people.

The Children's Services Strategic Quartet, chaired by the council's chief executive, will scrutinise progress against the plan at every meeting.

Progress will also be reported into the corporate assurance panel, an external panel monitoring the council's transformation.

Key stakeholders, including our workforce, will be kept informed of progress through quarterly communications. Feedback from our workforce will continue to be sought through existing forums/ mechanisms such as team meetings, senior leaders walking the floor, councillor frontline visits, and #talktogether staff sessions.

Glossary

The legal definition of a care leaver comes from The Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 which states that a care leaver is someone who has been in the care of the local authority for a period of 13 weeks or more spanning their 16th birthday.

Care leavers can also be referred to as care experienced young people or young adults, as they have had experience of being in care. This term tends to be preferred by young people/ young adults.

Both terms are used interchangeably within this plan.

Abbreviation	Expansion
CINCP	Child in Need and Child Protection
CYPMHS	Children and young people's mental health services
DfE	Department for Education
DLUHC	Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities
EET	Education, employment or training
ICB	Integrated Care Board
IRO	Independent Reviewing Officer
LGA	Local Government Association
MASH	Multi-agency safeguarding hub
NEET	Not in education, employment or training
NHS	National Health Service
PAs	Personal Advisors
PEPs	Personal education plans
RONI	Risk of NEET indicators
SLIP	Sector led improvement programme
SMART	Specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-based
UASC	Unaccompanied asylum-seeking children

Improvement Plan

All ratings are accurate as at 24 June 2024.

Chapter 1

1. Senior Leaders' Oversight

What needs to improve				
Senior leaders' oversight of performance to ensure that there is a coherent approach to continuous improvement.				
Section Lead	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Senior leaders had not recognised, until this inspection, the extent of improvement required in services for care leavers. Systems to monitor and track groups of individual children have not been effective in identifying vulnerable care leavers who are not receiving the services they need. As a result, too many vulnerable care leavers are not getting the right level of help, support or protection. Despite improvements, the quality of practice is still too variable. Improved timeliness has not been achieved for all children. Implementation of improvement plans needs to accelerate across teams but in particular within the care leavers service. Leaders have recognised in their self-evaluation that more needs to be done to ensure that quality assurance activity is identifying all areas of poor practice and that it is consistently having an impact on outcomes for children. Not all young people are informed of, or understand, the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
SL1	Ensure there is effective line of sight from frontline practice through to the Executive Director of Children's Services through a review of reporting and governance arrangements, including a review of the performance framework.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024 Review effectiveness each quarter	Green

SL2	Develop a forward plan of participation activities where senior leaders will hear the experiences of children and young people directly, work with them in shaping services, and give feedback on improvement progress.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Green
SL3	Refresh the terms of reference for the Improvement and Impact Board, and expand the board to incorporate partners, to ensure there are robust arrangements in place to drive and scrutinise impact for children and young people in response to the inspection findings.	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Blue
SL4	Establish a Children's Services Strategic Quartet to provide improved leadership and accountability for children's services in line with best practice in the LGA guide for Chief Executives , and for council leaders , and DfE statutory guidance on the roles and responsibilities of the Director of Children's Services and the Lead Member for Children's Services .	Executive Director of Children's Services	July 2024	Blue
SL5	Step-up a multi-agency corporate parent working group, chaired by the council's chief executive, to drive and scrutinise progress for cared for children and care experienced children and young people and ensure there is a whole council and partnership approach to supporting our young people.	Executive Director of Children's Services	October 2024	Green
SL6	Commission LGA corporate parenting training for senior leaders across the partnership and all elected members.	Executive Director of Children's Services	September 2024	Green
SL7	Develop care leaver champions across the council to increase awareness and support for care experienced young people and young adults.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	October 2024	Green
SL8	Refresh and relaunch the cared for children and care leavers strategy 2022-26 and action plan.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	November 2024	Green
SL9	Revise the quality assurance framework to include thematic audits in line with the improvement plan and to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	May 2024	Blue
SL10	Establish a service manager thematic audit group to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas and drive improvements.	Service Managers CINCP	July 2024	Green

SL11	Develop mechanisms to ensure audit findings are routinely shared with teams to strengthen the impact of audits on practice.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Green
SL12	Develop a vital signs performance report in line with the improvement plan areas to support effective evaluation of improvement activity and drive improvements.	Business Intelligence Manager	September 2024	Green
SL13	Review the programme for elected member visits to frontline services, expanding these to cared for and care leaver services, to ensure there is member oversight of quality of practice and outcomes for children and young people.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	November 2024	Green
SL14	Review the children's social care national framework and its implications for practice and processes, to embed consistently good practice that achieves strong outcomes for children and young people.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	November 2024	Green
SL15	Embed 'Doing the Basics Brilliantly' through our culture, leadership, and developing and sharing key communications on practice. Continually evaluate impact and reinforce messages through monthly performance meetings and quality assurance activity.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Principal Social Worker	Key communications in place by September 2024	Green
SL16	Collate and share examples of good practice to embed understanding of good practice across teams and to celebrate good work.	Principal Social Worker	Start sharing practice by August 2024 and continue throughout the year	Green

<p>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</p>	<p>The pace and impact of changes will be evaluated through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> monthly reports against the improvement plan monthly performance indicators in the vital signs performance report monthly practice review audits which assess the quality of practice across services monthly thematic audits to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas 	<p>What we will see when we've addressed this area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvements result in consistently good quality practice - over 80% of audits will be good or better quality. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of children's outcomes and areas for development. Senior leaders have an accurate understanding of the practice and development needs of staff on both an individual and workforce level. Quality assurance activity drives improvements to the quality of practice, resulting in improved outcomes for children.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • feedback from children and young people from our participation groups and through audits. • Ofsted monitoring visits will demonstrate whether our understanding of improvements are accurate. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 90% young people tell us they understand the pledges contained within the cared for children and care leavers' strategy. • The council will have at least 20 care leaver champions across all the directorates.
Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
What our performance indicators show			

2. Care Leavers

What needs to improve

The quality, consistency and responsiveness of support, advice and guidance for care leavers, including those who are homeless, with additional vulnerabilities, and those who are over 21 years of age.

A. Quality of practice

Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
What inspectors found	<p>The quality of practice for care leavers is inadequate.</p> <p>Relationships and transition to the care leavers' service</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not all children in care have the opportunity to get to know their personal advisers (PAs) to build a relationship with them before they are 18 years old. Planning for young people who transition to the leaving care service is not always robust. For some, their voice is not evident and plans lack detail which means their individual needs are not always sufficiently understood. This means that there are some young people who leave care with too much uncertainty about how they will be supported. • Not all PAs know their young people well enough to have trusted and meaningful relationships with them. For some young people, PAs do not know their stories of why, or when, they came into care. • Case records do not reflect the work undertaken with young people. <p>Pathway plans</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pathway plans do not consistently cover all the important elements of young people's lives. Wishes and feelings are not always clearly expressed. They do not consistently include other professionals, they are not sufficiently ambitious for young people and they do not always capture young people's voices. • Plans for unaccompanied asylum-seeking care leavers do not consistently acknowledge their unique cultural heritage, or identify how young people can access support for the trauma they have experienced. • Plans are not always effective in helping young people to make meaningful change in their lives. • Support for care leavers is not effective enough, which means that many do not access employment, further education or training. <p>Recognising and responding to risk</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Risk of harm is not always recognised or responded to effectively.

- For some young people, there is a lack of professional curiosity about their day-to-day lives and living arrangements. This has resulted in a lack of understanding of risk, or a clear recognition of how best to support young people when they are at their most vulnerable.
- When potential risk of harm for care leavers is identified, it is difficult to see how this risk is managed or mitigated effectively. This means that some care leavers may be exposed to risky situations and people. This was not fully understood by senior leaders until this inspection.

Management oversight

- PAs receive supervision, however the quality of supervision was variable. Most supervision is brief and task focused. Significant gaps in supervision exist on some young people's care files meaning there is a lack of consistent management grip on driving young people's plans forward and ensuring they are safe.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLA1	Develop and launch practice standards for the cared for and care leavers service to support consistently good practice. This will include clear standards on recording, visiting, transitions, and responsibilities when cases are jointly held.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Blue
CLA2	Develop and roll out a mandatory training plan that is specific for the care leavers service to support practitioners to deliver consistently good practice. This will include planning, professional curiosity, adult/ transitional safeguarding and culture/diversity.	Principal Social Worker Service Manager Care Leavers	Launch in June 2024 and deliver over the year	Green
CLA3	Change the management structure of the care leavers service, removing the role of senior PAs, ensuring that all PAs receive direct oversight and supervision from a team manager (who are qualified social workers) to support good quality supervision and drive improved outcomes for care leavers.	Service Manager Care Leavers	April 2024	Blue
CLA4	Revise the format of the pathway plan with young people to ensure it supports good practice. The new plan will include sections for multi-agency professionals' views, and contingency plans.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Blue
CLA5	Deliver restorative practice training to the whole care leavers service together to support a change in culture and consistency in practice.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers together with Stockport SLIP support	November 2024	Green

CLA6	Formalise arrangements around young adults where there are safeguarding concerns to ensure senior leaders have oversight of these young adults and that multi-agency team around the adult meetings are held to develop safety plans with them.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Green
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Please also see the section on management oversight and supervision

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans and will assess if PAs can tell young people's stories. • Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas, for example UASC young people. • Some of the thematic audits will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, the impact of their plan, and their relationships with their PAs. • The percentage of young people with PAs and pathway plans at 16. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Practice to support care leavers will be of consistently good quality and will support young people to achieve good outcomes. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • Management oversight is good quality and drives improved outcomes. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. • 100% of young people will get to know their PAs from age 16. 90% young people will tell us they have good relationships with their PAs and know how they will be supported once they leave care. • 100% PAs will be able to tell young people's stories. • 100% case records will accurately reflect work with young people. • Pathway plans will cover all the important elements of young people's lives, and will reflect their voices and their individual needs, including their cultural heritage. Plans will consistently include other professionals and will be ambitious for young people. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. • There is appropriate professional curiosity, which means risk of harm is recognised and responded to swiftly and effectively. When potential risk of harm is identified, it is managed or mitigated effectively. 100% audits will show appropriate professional curiosity and that risk of harm is responded to.
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Impact to date as at June 2024			Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			
Key improvement activities delivered this month			
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>			

What impact we are achieving for children and young people	
<i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>	
What our performance indicators show	

B. Planning for Adulthood

Section Lead	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transition planning into adulthood for most care leavers is variable. There is some proactive planning for disabled care leavers with complex physical needs, and young people with neurodiverse needs. However, for other care leavers such as those with complex mental health and emotional needs, proactive transition planning does not always take place. This means that these care leavers do not access the help and support that they need. • Not all care leavers have access to their full health history. This means important information that could be used to provide ongoing support to them as they transition to adulthood is not available or used to inform care planning for them. • Not all PAs spoken to by inspectors could describe the local offer to care leavers or explain how care leavers could benefit from it. Not all young people are accessing the full range of entitlements or services available to them. The local offer is not communicated effectively to all care leavers, which means that they are not all aware of, nor do they access, their full range of entitlements. • Care leavers can access community-based resources but do not have a dedicated place they can go to which provides a safe space for them to receive support. The plan is for the newly opened family hubs to provide this in the coming months but at present this is not available. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLB1	Embed within our culture and approach that we start planning for adulthood as soon as a child or young person enters care.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service Inclusion	Review impact in October 2024	Green

CLB2	Review terms of reference and membership for Ignition Panel to ensure young people's post 18 plans are effectively tracked and reviewed from age 16 to ensure proactive transition plans are in place.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
CLB3	The practice standards will specify which preparing for adulthood roles should be undertaken by social workers and which by PAs and will set clear expectations on what care leavers should receive/ have in place.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Blue
CLB4	Develop a care leavers hub as a safe space for care leavers to access support and advice. Advice sessions will be offered from the hub to support preparation for adulthood, including housing, finances, drug and alcohol support, parenting support, careers advice, CV workshops, and interview preparation. Emotional health and wellbeing support will be available at the hub through Pure Insight and health support through the cared for nurse.	Service Manager Care Leavers Area Delivery Manager Targeted Youth Work	Interim hubs in Crewe and Macclesfield by July 2024	Green
		Head of Service for Education Participation and Pupil Support	Permanent hub from the Crewe Youth Zone by the end of 2025	Green
CLB5	Review the transition policy.	Service Manager Cared for Children	December 2024	Green
CLB6	Engage and consult with care experienced young people on how they want to understand their health histories and adapt the current process in line with their feedback.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	October 2024	Grey
CLB7	Deliver training to PAs on arrangements to support young people to understand their health histories.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	June 2024	Blue
CLB8	Launch an app for the local offer. This will ensure all care leavers have immediate access to the local offer and their entitlements through their mobile. It will also support us to keep in touch with young people and gain their feedback and allow young people to develop peer support groups.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
CLB9	Review the local offer together with young people and partners.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	Green
CLB10	Deliver training on the local offer to all PAs.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be planning for adulthood. • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experience of services, what they know about the local offer, and how their plan is preparing them for adulthood. • The percentage of young people who have access to their health histories. • PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. • Feedback from young people accessing the care leaver hubs. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proactive planning takes place for all care leavers ensuring they are prepared for adulthood. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • 90% young people tell us they feel well supported and have the information they need to be prepared for adulthood. 90% tell us they know about the local offer, the care leavers hub, and their entitlements. • 100% care leavers have access to their health histories. • 100% PAs can describe the local offer and explain how care leavers can benefit from it. • 90% young people will tell us they know about the care leavers hubs.
Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>			Impact Rating
Key improvement activities delivered this month			
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>			
What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>			
What our performance indicators show			

C. Education, Employment and Training

Section Lead	Director of Education, Strong Start and Integration			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Too many care leavers are not in education, employment or training (NEET). They are not being encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances in order to achieve their aspirations for a better future. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLC1	All young adults who are NEET and able to work will have a EET plan to support them towards gaining EET. Plans will be reviewed every 12 weeks.	Service Manager Care Leavers	September 2024	Green
CLC2	Deliver our version of the Lincolnshire care leavers' scheme in which apprentices are employed by the council but are seconded out to carefully selected businesses in the young person's chosen field.	Service Manager Care Leavers	December 2024	Green
CLC3	Increase apprenticeship opportunities and other route to employment opportunities, such as work experience opportunities, both within and outside of the council.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Green
CLC4	Work with local businesses and organisations, including the chamber of commerce, to secure additional corporate parenting support for cared for children and care leavers and to prepare employers for supporting young people in employment.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2025	Green
CLC5	Provide bespoke support to enable young people to be prepared for entering employment through job readiness training, CV and interview support.	Service Manager Care Leavers	October 2024	Green
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of young people who are in EET. Monthly thematic audits completed by the service managers audit group will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be EET. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The percentage of care leavers who are in EET will increase – we want to increase to above 75% in EET. By April 2025, we would have at least 10 new apprenticeship opportunities for young adults. 90% young people will tell us they are encouraged and well supported to improve their life chances and access EET. 	
Impact to date as at June 2024				Impact Rating

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What our performance indicators show

D. Accommodation

Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers who live out of the area, accessing suitable housing is challenging and some wait for extended periods in supported accommodation until suitable permanent accommodation becomes available. • A small number of care leavers are homeless. This group includes some care leavers with the greatest needs, including those who struggle with their mental health, those who are not in education, employment or training (NEET) or those who are in unsuitable accommodation, or have no fixed abode. • Information about where young people are living is not routinely updated. This means that the local authority cannot be assured that these vulnerable young people are safe and well cared for. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLD1	Refresh and relaunch the protocol for care leavers in emergency accommodation, with clear escalation requirements, to ensure all practitioners are working to expected practice standards and there is senior leadership oversight of any young adults in emergency and unsuitable accommodation.	Service Manager Care Leavers	August 2024	Green

CLD2	All young people who are homeless, at risk of homelessness, or in emergency accommodation will be reviewed in weekly performance clinics and by the monthly risk management forum to ensure effective plans are in place to support and protect them.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Green
CLD3	The weekly temporary and emergency accommodation meeting will consider any care leavers who need accommodation.	Housing Options Manager	June 2024	Green
CLD4	Deliver training for PAs on supporting young adults with housing concerns, including how to support young people to meet the criteria for housing allocation in other areas, so they can provide bespoke support tailored to young adults' needs.	Housing Options Manager	July 2024	Green
CLD5	Establish a director level project group for accommodation for cared for young people and care leavers to drive increased sufficiency.	Interim Director of Commissioning	July 2024	Green
CLD6	Explore and review the suitability of temporary and emergency accommodation options across Cheshire East to increase options for care leavers. Identify gaps in provision to inform commissioning to ensure we can meet young people's needs.	Service Manager Care Leavers Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	September 2024	Green
CLD7	Develop proposals to address 16-18 and 18-25 accommodation shortages.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	July 2024	Green
CLD8	Mobilise additional accommodation options for cared for young people aged 16-18 using flexibilities/ modifications in current contracts.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	October 2024	Green
CLD9	Implement a wider 18-25 accommodation offer.	Head of Housing Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs	March 2026	Green

How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be accommodation. • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young people to understand their experiences. • The number of young people who are homeless. • The number of young people in unsuitable accommodation. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 80% care leavers who live out of area access suitable housing in a timely way. • 90% care leavers tell us they are well supported. • Effective plans and contingency plans prevent care leavers from needing to access emergency or unsuitable accommodation. Over 80% audits will be good or better quality. • Records on where young people are living are accurate and there is effective oversight of young people's accommodation.
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Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>	Impact Rating
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E. Care leavers aged over 21

Section Lead	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For care leavers over the age of 21, persistent efforts to engage them are not routinely made. • When young people become 21, unless they are in education or highly vulnerable, they are no longer provided with a PA or leaving care services unless they contact a duty worker and explicitly request help. At the time of this inspection, there were over 200 young people in

this category, and this included very vulnerable disabled young people. Some of these care leavers have not been receiving the services they need, or are entitled to, and the local authority cannot be assured that they are safe.

- It was not evident on young people's records that discussions had taken place to inform a decision as to young people's informed choice to move from having a personal advisor to the 21+ offer.
- Disabled care leavers who are open to the 21+ offer are not prioritised as a vulnerable group and as such the local authority cannot be assured that their needs are being met. In cases seen there was not enough evidence of persistence or curiosity in where they may be now, despite histories of having extensive engagement with services as children.
- The quality assurance of the care leaver cohort aged 21+ needs strengthening.

Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
CLE1	Contact all 209 care leavers aged over 21 to ensure they are aware of the support available to them and offer them an allocated worker.	Service Manager Care Leavers	March 2024	Blue
CLE2	Review the 21+ offer and approach, formalising this in a protocol and ensuring it is clear on the local offer. The protocol will include continued proactive communication post 21 so young people know what support is available.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
CLE3	Review cases for care leavers with a disability who are open to the 21+ offer to ensure their needs are being met.	Service Manager Care Leavers	June 2024	Blue
CLE4	Develop a tracker for care leavers aged over 21 and monitor through weekly performance clinics to ensure there is regular oversight of engagement and support with these young people.	Service Manager Care Leavers	May 2024	Blue
CLE5	Establish regular quality assurance around care leavers aged over 21 to ensure there is effective oversight of their outcomes and that this drives improvement.	Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers Head of Service for Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	August 2024	Green

Please also see CLB5 – Review the Transition Policy.

How we'll assess if we've	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be support to those 21 and over, including those with a disability. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Persistent efforts to engage young adults over 21 are routinely made. We are in touch with over 90% of care leavers over 21 in the last 3 months.
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addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The thematic audit will involve phone calls to young adults to understand their experience of services. • The percentage of care leavers over 21 who we were in touch with within the last 3 months. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Over 90% young adults will tell us they know that support is available if they need it. • There is effective oversight of young adults aged 21+ and their outcomes, including young adults with a disability.
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3. Quality of plans

What needs to improve				
The quality of plans for children to ensure that they are more child-focused and drive forward positive change in a timely way.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p>Child in need and child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of child protection plans is inconsistent. Some are outcome focused although some lack purpose and urgency. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning. The quality of safety plans is inconsistent, mostly relying on vulnerable parents and are overly optimistic. The use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. Multi-agency core groups meet regularly to review progress however social workers do not routinely update children’s experiences against the child protection plan. For some children who have been known to services for several years and have been the subject of repeat child protection and child in need plans, the quality of practice is too variable. Contingency thinking and planning are not strong enough for these children. This means that, for some children, plans are not effective in improving their outcomes. When child in need and child protection plans do not progress, there was drift and delay for children, and ineffective challenge from the chair and multi-agency group in child in need meetings, core groups and review conferences. <p>Cared for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The quality of care plans for children is inconsistent. Consideration is not routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage. Some children are subject to statutory intervention for longer than they need to be. This is due to delays in the discharge of care orders. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
P1	Embed the agreed restorative practice model approach to support requirement for consistently good practice.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024	Green

P2	Continue to provide masterclasses – short in-house training sessions for practitioners and managers on specific topics. This will include planning. The masterclass programme will continue to be responsive to audit findings to support improved practice.	Principal Social Worker	Starting in April 2024 and running throughout the year	Green
P3	Hold a management and leadership session on planning to ensure there is a shared understanding on what constitutes a good quality plan, and that the role of team managers and IROs is clear in scrutinising plans to ensure all plans are good quality.	All Service Managers	September 2024	Green
P4	Establish a panel to consider longer child protection plans and repeat plans. This will include reviews of previous plans to ensure this shapes stronger planning.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Child Protection	July 2024	Green
P5	Review the permanence policy to ensure permanence planning is considered and progressed from an early stage, with permanence plans being in place at the second cared for review. The permanence policy should consider all routes to permanence, including reunification.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager Cared for Children Service Managers for Cared for Children	August 2024	Green
P6	Refresh the practice standards on care planning in line with the refreshed permanence policy to ensure expectations on practice are clear.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	August 2024	Grey
P7	Review permanence decision panels to ensure effectiveness of permanence planning.	Service Managers for Cared for Children	October 2024	Green
P8	Explore within the multiagency safeguarding group what training is needed to support effective partnership challenge.	Children’s Safeguarding Partnership Training Manager	December 2024	Grey

Please also see action MO5 - Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence planning within statutory and children’s timescales.

How we’ll assess if we’ve addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of plans across all service areas. • Multi-agency audits will tell us about the quality of multi-agency challenge in supporting plan progression. 	What we will see when we’ve addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plans will be consistently good quality, with effective contingency plans, child-focused and result in good outcomes for children and young people. It will be easy for everyone to see what needs to happen from the plan. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality.
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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Permanence planning will be a focus of thematic audits. • The percentage of plans judged good or better. • The percentage of plans within timescales. • The percentage of children on repeat child protection plans. • Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. • The percentage of permanence plans in place by the second review. • The number of children on care orders and number of care orders discharged. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Drift and delay is prevented through effective management oversight and partnership challenge. • Consideration is routinely given to permanence planning for children from an early stage and children achieve permanence in a timely way. • Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%. • 100% permanence plans will be in place by the second review.
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4. Quality and frequency of visits

What needs to improve				
The quality and frequency of visits to children so that they are purposeful and in line with assessed needs.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<p>Child in need and child protection</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children in need and those subject to child protection plans are not always carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need. Not all visits are carried out within local authority prescribed or statutory timescales. There is a lack of clarity on the expected visiting times for children in need. • Some children are not visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. Changes in social workers impacts this. • Visits to children do not always have purpose and do not link to their plans clearly enough. Records of visits vary in depth and quality of detail. Some visits are very brief, and their contribution towards the assessment or progress of the plan is limited. <p>Cared for children</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children in care are not always carried out in line with statutory visiting schedules or their assessed need. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
V1	Strengthen the performance framework to ensure robust performance management of visits to children.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Green
V2	Support improved visiting practice through the masterclass training programme and briefings to team meetings.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Green
V3	Reissue the visiting template to practitioners to ensure consistency in recording.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Green
V4	Develop and roll out e-learning on visiting to support purposeful visits that are carried out with a frequency that reflects children's needs.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Green

<p>How we'll assess if we've addressed this area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and visits, and the quality of relationships with children and young people. • Timeliness of visits. 	<p>What we will see when we've addressed this area</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Visits to children are carried out at a frequency reflecting assessed need and this is clearly recorded on their files. Over 80% visits will be in line with need as shown through audit. • Children are visited often enough for social workers to build trusting relationships with them. 90% of young people will tell us they trust their social workers. • Visits to children are purposeful and clearly link to their assessments or plans.
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5. Management Oversight and Supervision

What needs to improve				
The quality of management oversight and supervision to ensure that consistent, good social work practice is in place.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Child in Need and Child Protection			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Management oversight and challenge are not fully embedded across all service areas. Management oversight across all service areas does not provide sufficient challenge or reflection to improve social work practice. For some children, this has led to their needs not being recognised or acted upon in a timely way. • The quality of supervision is too variable. Supervision is not always sufficiently analytical or reflective. Supervision is not consistently driving children’s plans forward, actions although timebound roll over for many months without completion. This means not all children’s circumstances are sufficiently understood. • For a small number of young children who live in children’s homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children’s care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. • Recent arrangements to track permanence for children have been introduced, but it is too soon to see the impact of this, and some children continue to experience drift and delay. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
MO1	Commission a bespoke leadership development programme to support all leaders in children’s services (from team leaders and above) to develop their leadership, reflective skills, and confidence in effective challenge to improve practice and outcomes for children.	Principal Social Worker	Running between March 2024 - June 2025	Green
MO2	Deliver an in-house leadership and management development programme for children’s social care, tailored to our areas for improvement, to support a culture of high support and high challenge and embed consistently good quality practice.	Principal Social Worker	To commence in April 2024 and run throughout the year	Green
MO3	Update the supervision policy and develop practice guidance on reflective supervision based on best practice.	Principal Social Worker	September 2024	Green

MO4	All managers to complete supervision training to support them to deliver reflective supervision that considers children’s lived experiences, supports learning and improves practice.	Principal Social Worker	October 2024	Green
MO5	Embed the permanence tracker to monitor achieving permanence within statutory and children’s timescales.	Service Manager Cared for Children	Evaluate impact in October 2024	Green
MO6	Review the care plans for all cared for children who are not currently in foster care or planning to return home to ensure they are on the right plan.	Head of Service Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Green
How we’ll assess if we’ve addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and management oversight. These audits include a review of case supervision which informs the judgement on management oversight. The percentage of supervision within timescales. 	What we will see when we’ve addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Management oversight and challenge are embedded across all service areas. Over 80% of management oversight in audits will be good or better quality. Supervision is consistently good quality, analytical and reflective. Management oversight improves social work practice, leading to children and young people receiving timely support and experiencing good outcomes. Children achieve permanence in a timely way. 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. Over 90% supervision will be within timescales. 	
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6. Effectiveness of IROs

What needs to improve				
The effectiveness of child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IROs) to escalate, challenge and scrutinize plans for children.				
Section Lead	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Child protection chairs are not consistently effective in driving forward plans for children. Some children have been subject to protracted child protection planning, some plans lack purpose and urgency. They do not consistently advocate for children. Consequently, there are missed opportunities to act when risks increase, or changes have not happened within the child's timeframe. For example, for children who experience long-term neglect. Child protection chairs recognise they need to be more specific about what needs to change within the timeframe for children. Some plans are lengthy and opaque, the use of jargon makes it difficult for parents to understand what is required. Permanence plans are not routinely identified by the time of children's second reviews, leading to drift and delay of children's plans. For some children, IROs were not seen to actively raise this within the cared for children's review. IROs do not always robustly challenge the appropriateness of plans, which are not always-outcome focused, or challenge drift. The quality and impact of care planning for cared for children was variable. For some children, the impact of multiple social workers and IROs has resulted in drift and delay of their plans and permanence. For a small number of young children who live in children's homes there have been significant delays in driving their care plans forward to secure long-term permanence. This is because there has not been effective management oversight and supervision of children's care plans, and IROs do not routinely challenge drift and delay. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
IR1	Review the performance management framework for IROs to ensure that we can evidence their impact in children's plans and children's lives.	Head of Service for Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	September 2024	Green
IR2	IROs will be included in the in-house and commissioned leadership and management development programme. This will ensure we have a consistent understanding of quality and expectations on practice and joint approach to improvement.	Principal Social Worker	IROs to be included by April 2024	Blue

IR3	Review and refresh the IRO practice standards to embed consistently good quality practice.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Review quarterly at service development days	Green
IR4	Hold an IRO service development day every 3 months to embed consistently good practice.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	Every 3 months from June 2024	Green
IR5	Revise the guidance on IRO quality assurance alerts to support improved outcome-focused practice in line with our key improvement areas, e.g. planning, tailored visiting, and preventing drift and delay.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Managers	August 2024	Green
IR6	Explore and challenge performance around permanence in performance clinics with IROs to ensure this is achieved within children's timescales.	Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager, Cared for Children	May 2024	Blue
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice and plans. Themes and impact of IRO quality assurance alerts. Percentage of plans that are good or better quality. Number of children on CP plans over 15 months. Percentage of repeat child protection plans. Percentage of permanence plans at the second review. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> IROs consistently drive forward plans and advocate for children. Plans are good quality, outcome-focused, and result in good outcomes for children. Over 80% plans audited will be good or better quality. Children achieve long-term permanence in a timely way. 100% children will have a permanence plan by their second review. Repeat child protection plans will be under 15%. 	
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7. Sufficiency of placements

What needs to improve				
The sufficiency of suitable placements that can meet children and young people’s assessed needs.				
Section Lead	Head of Service Children’s Provision			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, there is variability in how quickly potential carers from within the extended family are identified. • Challenges to sufficiency impact on the choice of placements and the quality of children’s experiences. Some children still live in homes that do not match their needs, due to a lack of choice. Sufficiency of in-house foster carers is a challenge. • Some children experience multiple placement moves, which are unsettling for them. There are inconsistencies in management oversight and recording as to the rationale for this. • A small number of young children who now live in children’s homes have experienced frequent moves in foster care placements and too many changes in social worker. Some young children live in residential children’s homes for long periods of time. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
S1	Embed a culture of considering support from the family network at the earliest opportunity, including identifying potential carers from within the extended family where children can’t remain in the care of their birth parents.	Head of Service Child in Need and Child Protection Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	September 2024	Green
S2	Join Foster4, which will provide additional resources for fostering recruitment and training.	Head of Service Children’s Provision	May 2024	Blue
S3	Work in partnership with the other local authorities to build our Foster4 offer, ensuring there is an effective front door to the fostering service so we can effectively support those who make an enquiry and increase the number of foster carers within Cheshire East.	Head of Service Children’s Provision	October 2024	Green

S4	Explore opportunities within the council to increase fostering marketing and raise awareness of fostering to increase the number of people considering fostering.	Head of Service Children's Provision	October 2024	Green
S5	Develop specialist foster carers to support children and young people to step down from residential care.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	Green
S6	Develop our third Mockingbird constellation to increase support for foster carers and children and young people in foster care.	Service Manager for Fostering	August 2024	Green
S7	Open three Cheshire East Council residential children's homes, which will include one emergency bed, to increase the placement options for Cheshire East's young people.	Head of Service Children's Provision	Flude House to open in April 2024	Blue
			Claremont House to open in July 2024	Green
			Victoria Lodge to open in September 2024	Green
S8	Carry out a deep dive on reunification and step down for children from care as part of the council's transformation programme.	Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	Green
S9	Investigate the potential for joint commissioning of high needs placements for children with relevant system partners, developing costed business cases where required, to support increased placement options for young people.	Strong Start Programme Lead Head of Service Children's Provision	December 2024	Grey
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in in-house fosters and increase in range of foster carers to support different groups, for example older young people. • Percentage of children and young people in foster care with Cheshire East carers. • Reduction in the timeframe to bring in new foster carers. • Number of children and young people with 3 or more placement moves. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • When children cannot remain in the care of their birth parents, their networks are explored at an early stage to support them to remain with their wider family where possible. • There is sufficient choice of placements to meet children and young people's needs, which means children are placed in a home that is right for them. • Children and young people experience stable homes and placement moves are prevented/ limited wherever possible. 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people will report that their placements meet their needs and they feel safe and supported. 		
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Chapter 2

1. The Front Door

Section Lead	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> For some children and families, there is a delay in the step-up from early help services to statutory services. The step-up process is not as streamlined as it should be. For a small number of children, obtaining information from partner agencies and the voice of the child can lead to a delay in decision-making when the threshold is clearly met. Issues relating to parental consent are not always well recorded. The multi-agency partnership is not routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children, or, when managers make decisions to close referrals. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
FD1	Update the contact guidance to include that where the threshold for a referral is clearly met, cases must be actioned immediately. This guidance will also include ensuring consent is clearly recorded. Embed the guidance to support consistently good practice.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Green
FD2	Review multi-agency safeguarding hub (MASH) arrangements in other local authorities to learn from good practice and inform the development of multi-agency decision making in the front door.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse Service Manager Integrated Front Door	July 2024	Green
FD3	Hold a collaborative workshop to review the current front door provision and agree actions to establish multi-agency decision-making, informed by the inspection findings and observation of good practice in other areas.	Head of Service Early Help, Prevention and Domestic Abuse	September 2024	Grey
FD4	Consider chapter 3 of Working Together 2023 in the safeguarding partnership to establish agreed multi-agency working arrangements.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	December 2024	Green

			Chair of the Safeguarding Partnership and statutory partners within the partnership		
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly multi-agency front door thematic audits will conduct deep dives to understand our support to specific cohorts/ within specific areas. One theme will be step up to social care. These audits also consider consent and timeliness of decisions. The percentage of contacts that are referred to children's social care completed within 24 hours. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Families stepping-up from early help services to statutory services will swiftly receive support. Over 90% of referrals to children's social care will be within 24 hours. 90% parental consent will be well recorded. All decisions for referrals to children's social care will be made swiftly. Over 80% referrals audited will be good quality. The multi-agency partnership is routinely included in social care decisions about next steps to help and protect children and when managers make decisions to close referrals. 		
Impact to date as at June 2024					Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					
Key improvement activities delivered this month					
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>					
What impact we are achieving for children and young people					
<i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>					
What our performance indicators show					

2. Strategy Meetings

Section Lead	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy meetings do not consistently capture the discussion about risk, which means that the rationale for decisions made, and next steps, is not always clear. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
SM1	Deliver a workshop on strategy meetings for team managers to support consistently good practice.	Service Managers CINCP	August 2024	Green
SM2	Deliver training for unit coordinators on minute taking to support consistently good practice across the team in capturing discussions on risk.	Children and Family Service Business Support Lead	August 2024	Green
SM3	A management analysis box to be added to the strategy discussion form to ensure a clear rationale for decisions is included.	Service Managers CINCP	June 2024	Blue
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy discussion audits within the 8-weekly multi-agency liaison meetings will tell us about the quality of strategy discussions and whether the rationale for decisions is clearly recorded. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Strategy meetings consistently capture the discussion about risk which means that the rationale for decisions and next steps is clear. 90% strategy discussions will have a clear rationale for decisions. 	
Impact to date as at June 2024				Impact Rating
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What our performance indicators show	

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3. Life-story work and later-life letters

Section Lead		Head of Service for Cared for Children and Care Leavers			
What inspectors found		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life-story work and later-life letters are not usually started in a timely way. This means that children have limited opportunities to understand their journey into care at a time that is right for them. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating	
LS1	Commission external training on life-story work to ensure practitioners understand the expectation, importance, and how to complete it.	Principal Social Worker	July 2024	Green	
LS2	Include in the permanence policy and practice standards for care planning that the expectation for every child is that life story work and later life letters are started early.	Service Managers Cared for Children Safeguarding and Quality Assurance Manager Cared for Children	August 2024	Green	
LS3	Establish a process for monitoring and reviewing life-story work and later-life letters.	Service Managers Cared for Children	August 2024	Green	
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Feedback from children and young people, and their carers – children will tell us they have a better understanding of their life stories. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Life-story work and later-life letters are started early so children understand why they are in care. 		
Impact to date as at June 2024					Impact Rating
<i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>					
Key improvement activities delivered this month					
<i>Reporting to start from July 2024</i>					

What impact we are achieving for children and young people

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What our performance indicators show

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4. Health of Cared for Children

Section Lead	Associate Director Quality and Safety Cheshire East, Cheshire and Merseyside NHS			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting lists result in some delay in children accessing emotional support services. • A small number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC) and young people wait too long to access emotional support and counselling due to waiting lists. • Initial and review health assessments are not always completed within appropriate timescales. 			
Ref	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
H1	Develop prioritisation matrices/ approaches to ensure the most vulnerable children and young people are prioritised for support based on an understanding of the additional and differing needs and risks for children with experience of the care system.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	Green
H2	Develop 'waiting well' initiatives with key health providers and third sector provision to support children and young people while they wait based on an understanding of protective factors and how they can be increased and developed in response to needs.	Head of Commissioning Children, Families and Adults with Complex Needs Programme Lead for Mental Health and Neurodiversity – Cheshire East NHS ICB	March 2025	Green
H3	Review the current emotional support offer for UASC young people in Cheshire East, taking into account any recommendations/ good practice from the Cheshire and Merseyside scoping exercise on support to UASC young people.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	March 2025	Green
H4	Health and children's social care to jointly review the timeliness of health assessments on a six-weekly basis to support improved timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Blue
H5	Develop a single point of contact for health assessments within the local authority to support increased timeliness.	Service Manager Cared for Children	May 2024	Blue

H6	Report quarterly to NHS England on out of area initial and review health assessments that are out of timescale to drive improved timeliness.	Designated Nurse Safeguarding and Looked After Children	May 2024	Blue
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Waiting lists for children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS). • Timeliness of annual health assessments, initial and review health assessments. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children and young people access children and young people's mental health services (CYPMHS) without delay. 90% of non-urgent referrals receive an assessment within 6 weeks. 90% wait no more than 6 weeks between assessment and treatment. • 90% annual health assessments will be completed within timescales. 	
Impact to date as at June 2024 <i>Our assessment of where we are in relation to what the inspectors found</i>				Impact Rating
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What impact we are achieving for children and young people <i>What our quality assurance activity tells us – including audits, surveys, feedback from children, young people and families, and feedback from our workforce. Include any risks or if any new actions have been identified.</i>				
What our performance indicators show				

5. Education for Cared for Children

Section Lead	Head of Service for Inclusion			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Too many primary-aged children in care experience attendance issues as they move into secondary school. • Personal education plans (PEPs) contain the required information, but outcomes for children in care overall are low. • Many children in care are ill-prepared for adulthood and struggle to cope with the challenges that they face when they leave care. • The identification of children and young people who are at risk of not being in employment, education or training (NEET) does not begin early enough. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
ED1	Review attendance through education advisors' fortnightly attendance meetings and determine clear actions for young people to improve their attendance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Blue
ED2	Review the plans for those with lower than 50% attendance, in alternative provision, or not in full time education, in a forum chaired by a head of service, to ensure there are clear actions on what needs to happen and there is senior leader oversight of these young people.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Blue
ED3	Hold multi-disciplinary team meetings for individual children and young people when required to improve attendance. These meetings develop a plan to improve attendance and continue to meet until attendance has improved.	Head of Service for Inclusion	April 2024	Blue
ED4	Improve the quality of PEPs through delivering training, ensuring we are ambitious for young people, targets are SMART, and there is a clear early planning for preparing young people for adulthood and securing EET.	Head of Service for Inclusion	Delivery from September - December 2024	Green
ED5	Review the PEP form to ensure that this supports improvement in areas where care experienced young people attain less well than their peers, for example reading.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Green
ED6	Report cared for children's attainment against their peers within scorecards and performance reports to drive improved performance.	Head of Service for Inclusion	September 2024	Green

ED7	Audit young adults who are NEET at 20 and look what learning can be taken from their preparation for adulthood to improve our support.	Head of Service for Inclusion Service Manager for Care Leavers	August 2024	Green
ED8	Use the risk of NEET indicators (RONI) to identify which cared for young people in Year 11 are at risk of NEET and ensure that the right support is in place to support them into EET.	Area Delivery Manager Youth Support Service – NEET and Preparing for Adulthood	November 2024	Green
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Percentage attendance for cared for children. • Educational outcomes for cared for children. • PEP audits will tell us about the quality of PEPs and impact, and how well they support preparation for adulthood and prevent young people becoming NEET. • Percentage of PEPs that are good or better quality. • Percentage of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 that are NEET. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 95% attendance for all cared for children • Educational outcomes for cared for children are good and in line with their peers. • Cared for young people are well prepared for adulthood. • Children and young people who are at risk of NEET begins early and helps to prevent them becoming NEET. • 95% of PEPs are graded as good or better • 90% of young people in care in Year 12 and 13 are EET. 	
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What our performance indicators show				

6. Workforce

Section Lead	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care			
What inspectors found	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Frequent changes in social workers impact on the quality of relationships and the progress of plans for some children, leading to delay. • Too many children have experienced changes in social worker, which means they must retell their story, and this prevents them from being able to build trusting relationships. • The impact of multiple social workers and IROs on care planning has resulted in drift and delay for some children in achieving permanence. 			
Ref	Action	Action Owner	Due by	Rating
W1	Review capacity across children's social care and supporting services to deliver the improvement plan and develop a costed proposal to the Children and Families Committee.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	July 2024	Green
W2	Assess demand to the care leavers service and determine what capacity is needed to support allocation at 15 years 9 months and to increase support to care leavers aged 21+.	Service Manager Care Leavers	July 2024	Green
W3	Review capacity across the two IRO teams to look at how we can create dedicated time for supporting and driving improved outcomes for care leavers.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding and Quality Assurance	July 2024	Green
W4	Reestablish a workforce, recruitment and retention group for children's social care.	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	September 2024	Grey
W5	Refresh the recruitment and retention strategy.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	December 2024	Grey
W6	Develop and launch a refreshed recruitment campaign to attract high quality practitioners and managers to Cheshire East.	Head of HR Principal Social Worker	January 2025	Grey
W7	Develop reporting on caseloads specific to each service on what we would expect to see to support effective oversight.	Executive Director of Children's Services	August 2024	Green

			Business Intelligence Manager		
W8	Launch a level 7 apprentice scheme (a masters equivalent programme, so a shorter programme than our current BA equivalent level 6 apprenticeships) to supplement our current scheme supporting people to train as social workers with Cheshire East.		Principal Social Worker	To start in March 2025	Green
W9	Seek practitioners' views on the support they receive to deliver good practice, workloads, and progress to date, through the practice review audits, elected member frontline visits, and walking the floor.		Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	Green
W10	Keep the children's workforce updated on developments around the inspection findings through the monthly children's newsletter and monthly talk together sessions with the DCS to ensure there is a joined up approach to improvement.		Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly review	Green
How we'll assess if we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Monthly practice review audits will tell us about the quality of practice across all service areas and include feedback from children and families on their relationships with their workers. Caseload data. The percentage of social worker vacancies, and the percentage turnover rate for social workers. 	What we will see when we've addressed this area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social workers build effective and trusting relationships with children and families, which supports improved outcomes for children and young people. 90% young people tell us that they trust their social workers. Teams are stable, meaning children and young people don't experience frequent changes in social worker or IROs. Average caseloads are 15 for AYSEs, 20 for cared for, and 23 for CINCP. 80% practitioners tell us that their caseloads are manageable and they feel well supported by managers. 		
Impact to date as at June 2024					Impact Rating
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Key improvement activities delivered this month					
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Appendix 2: Financial Support to the Improvement Plan

Purpose of Report

- 1 This report sets out the additional financial support needed over the next 18 months to ensure we can deliver the necessary improvements following the Ofsted ILACS inspection.
- 2 Cheshire East Council's Children's Services has received an inadequate judgement. This inspection outcome has demonstrated that there are areas that must be addressed at pace, to improve outcomes for children and young people. The service is committed to taking the necessary steps to improve all areas identified within the inspection, in a timely way to ensure good outcomes for children and young people and to provide assurance to elected members that the arrangements in place to address the shortcomings and make the necessary improvements, are sufficiently robust and will deliver good or better outcomes for children and young people of Cheshire East.
- 3 Committee is recommended to approve the financial support outlined in this paper.

Cost of inadequate judgements

- 4 The council is experiencing significant financial challenge and Children's Services recognise the role that it has in ensuring good provision of services to children and young people whilst also demonstrating effective financial management. From the experiences of other local authorities, inadequate judgements bring additional costs. Advice from the sector is that the costs to council's judged inadequate can range from £5m-£15m.
- 5 We estimate that the costs for Cheshire East will not be as significant, as only one of our service areas was judged to be inadequate and we have demonstrated that we already have effective processes in place to deliver improvements.
- 6 There is a significant reputational and financial risk to not delivering improvements. If services remain inadequate at the next inspection, further intervention measures may need to be put in place, for example escalation to a Statutory Direction notice, or Direction that another person or organisation

performs the functions on the local authority's behalf. These measures will have a significantly higher cost. The identified funding at this stage is to reduce the risk of Cheshire East Children's Services moving in and out of inadequate Ofsted judgements and to support the service to achieve good or better outcomes for children and young people.

Additional capacity to support achieving consistently good practice.

- 7 Having sufficient frontline practitioners to work directly with children, young people and families is critical in supporting consistently good quality services. Whilst we note that the inspection report identified manageable caseloads, it is also the case that they didn't find consistently good practice. We propose to increase capacity to enable practitioners to have time to conduct good quality work, accurately record this, and have time to undertake training and development and reflect on practice with their managers and teams.
- 8 Additional roles are also recommended to support our transformation to a Children's Services that benefit from tried and tested models of working that support children to be supported within their own families and networks. The Independent Review into Children's Social Care and subsequent government pathfinders [Families first for children \(FFC\) pathfinder programme and family networks pilot \(FNP\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/pathfinders/families-first-for-children) is leading the way in local authorities supporting families and kinship carers to be able to care for their children at home. Developing approaches around Family Group Conferencing, including lifelong support for Care Leavers, strong edge of care offer and capacity within Connected Carer Services will strengthen our programme to support children at home, reduce demand into services and help to manage the council expenditure on placement costs.
- 9 Additional posts have been costed for 18 months with an approximate start date of 2 September 2024, to allow for time to recruit.
- 10 It is proposed that the core social care posts of social workers, Personal Advisors (PAs), Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) and Team Leaders will be recruited to on a permanent basis. This will make the posts more attractive to recruit to in a challenging market and will prevent post holders leaving posts early as they look for new work before their contract ends. It avoids the need to recruit to these posts on a costly agency basis. We know we can expect movement within the system and these posts will be used to fill vacancies created by the normal flux in the workforce as people move to new opportunities, as we come to the end of the 18-month period. There is also an opportunity to utilise posts as part of a bank of workers as an alternative to using agency workers at a higher cost to the authority.
- 11 These core social care posts will be critical in supporting care leavers, by ensuring caseloads for PAs and social workers supporting cared for children and care leavers, are maintained at a sufficiently low level to allow for good practice to flourish and ensuring that there is sufficient time to build and

sustain relationships with young people. Having sufficient capacity in the IRO Service will ensure independent oversight of care leaver's pathway plans and the additional Team Leaders capacity will be used to develop a Family Group Conferencing offer that will include development of an approach to support care leavers to build and sustain lifelong relationships with their birth families and networks.

- 12 Advice has been provided by the DfE Advisor to Children's Services, the Local Government Association (LGA) and the DfE in relation to the need to consider the current capacity and resources within the Directorate. This report is to ensure transparency to elected members, that in order to progress improvements at pace and deliver services that are good or better for the children of Cheshire East, we need to identify additional funding. The table below sets out what will be required to improve services.

13 Revenue costings

<u>Roles required</u>	<u>Grade</u>	<u>Rationale</u>	<u>2024/25</u>	<u>2025/26</u>	<u>Improvement plan ref</u>
Independent Reviewing Officers (IRO) x 2	11	Additional IROs will bring Cheshire East in line with the IRO Handbook recommendation for the number of children allocated to an IRO. This will ensure independent reviews of Care Leaver's Pathway Plans. Further work in relation to reunification, edge of care and support to families will reduce Cared for Children numbers.	£82,842	£133,434	IP Ch.1, S. 6
Connected Carer Assessors x 2	10	Additional capacity to build on existing work to support children to remain in the care of Connected and Kinship Carers, as per the recommendation of the Independent Review into Children's Social Care. This will ensure that we can reduce reliance on the external market, providing long term sustainable homes for children in care and care leavers.	£71,212	£114,702	IP Ch.1, S.3, P.5
Social Worker x 6	10	Manageable caseloads for social workers across the	£213,636	£344,106	IP Ch.2, S.6

		<p>system, with responsibility for cared for children, is essential to ensure time for good care planning and permanency planning.</p> <p>Having the capacity for good planning at the earlier stages of a child coming into care, will ensure that where children can be supported to return home to family or family networks, this will be achieved in a timely manner. This will result in the right children remaining in our care.</p> <p>Where children do need to remain in our care and become our care leavers, social workers and their Team Managers, will have the capacity to develop good relationships with them and provide quality support as they progress into adulthood.</p>			
Team Leaders x 2	11	Additional Team Leader capacity is needed to support transformation work of Edge of Care and Family Group Conferencing.	£82,842	£133,434	IP Ch.2, S.6
PAs x 3	7	The Care Leavers Service was inadequate in the recent Ofsted inspection. Additional PA support is needed to ensure that the service has sufficient capacity to support care leavers, including 21+ appropriately.	£77,517	£124,860	IP Ch.1, S.2
Quality Assurance Officer	11	<p>Having an effective quality assurance framework is essential to truly know ourselves and understand the quality of practice across services.</p> <p>The QA Framework has evolved to ensure that a wider range of</p>	£41,421	£66,717	IP Ch.1, SL1

		QA activity is taking place, including themed practice audits of the support and intervention being offered to care leavers.			
Family Group Conference (FGC) Support Workers x 4	7	FGC and lifelong support to care leavers, is important to improve the numbers of children remaining with and in contact with their birth family/networks.	£166,480	£166,480	IP Ch.1, S.3, P.5
Edge of Care Support Workers x 5	7	Strengthening our Edge of Care Service to offer support to children, young people and families, where they require additional support to care for their children at home and to manage risk in the community.	£208,100	£286,755	
Project Manager to lead development of 18-25 accommodation	11	To develop accommodation sufficiency for 18-25 year olds as identified by Ofsted. Lack of sufficiency in Cheshire East is leading to higher costs for accommodation.	£41,421	£66,717	IP Ch.1, S.2, D
Specialist expert support		Additional expert capacity as and when necessary, to support quality of practice in specialist areas	£100,000		P Ch.1, S.1
Total Cost over 2 years			£1,986,599	£628,050	£1,358,549

- 14 Where possible, we will utilise any free resources that are available from the DfE, LGA or Sector Led Improvement Partner (SLIP) arrangements, to support the improvement journey. We are keen to continue learning from best practice elsewhere.

How this will be managed within the current budget

- 15 The additional costs to support the improvement programme will be met through the diversion of underutilised growth, achieved through prudent budget management of a commercially sensitive area.
- 16 If there are any in year adjustments within the budget for children's services, any surplus will be returned to offset any pressures due to the improvement activity.

- 17 As part of the MTFs, Children’s Services will continue with work to reduce the costs of placements through developing robust edge of care services, permanency and reunification to families and connected carers.

Capital investment to improve placement sufficiency.

- 18 The challenges associated with sourcing suitable accommodation should not be underestimated and interdepartmental and partnership work will be required to ensure that the right solution is arrived at, at pace within the parameters of the challenging financial situation.
- 19 There may be a strong case for invest to save propositions which will need to be considered in year to avoid any drift in delivery. We are exploring the use of s106 funding and capital receipts to increase sufficiency for young people aged 18+, which was a key deficit highlighted within the inspection.
- 20 Any proposal, as required will be presented to the necessary committees.

Access to Information	
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