

OPEN

## **Children and Families Committee**

**15 September 2025**

### **Improvement Plan Progress Report**

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**Report of: Dawn Godfrey Executive Director of Children's Services**

**Report Reference No: CF/22/25-26**

**Ward(s) Affected: All**

**For Scrutiny**

#### **Purpose of Report**

- 1 This report is part of our regular updates to committee on the progress of the children's services improvement plan. The improvement plan addresses the findings from the Ofsted inspection in February and March 2024.
- 2 This report also includes the [findings from the second Ofsted monitoring visit in June 2025](#), the findings from the sector led improvement partner (SLIP) work in August 2025, and the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in July 2025.

#### **Executive Summary**

- 3 We are continuing to make progress in delivering our improvement plan; since the [last report to committee](#) in June, the percentage of actions completed has increased from 27% to 49%.
- 4 The second Ofsted monitoring visit found that the quality of practice for children in need and children at child protection is inconsistent. Improvements have been made in specific areas of practice, such as the regularity of supervision and frequency of visits to children, and there are appropriate plans in place to further develop and embed improvements. This reflects what we expected inspectors to find.
- 5 The sector led improvement partner (SLIP) work completed over 11-13 August found strengths in our support, and we are continuing to work with our SLIP colleagues to support improvements to services.

- 6 The [new arrangements for councillor visits to frontline services](#) commenced in July, enabling councillors to have oversight of the quality of practice and people's experiences of working for the council.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.
2. Note the findings from the second Ofsted monitoring visit on children in need and child protection in June 2025.
3. Note the findings from the councillor visits to the cared for service, care leaver service and court team in July 2025.

## Background

- 7 Improvement governance arrangements are continuing to monitor progress against the plan and provide scrutiny and challenge monthly. Changes to the plan since the last report which have been agreed through these arrangements are included in Appendix 3 for transparency.

## Progress against the improvement plan

- 8 The improvement plan at Appendix 2 was updated on 22 July 2025. Appendix 1 shows an overview of the RAG ratings for each action.
- 9 Key improvement activity which has taken place since the last update to committee includes:
- Implementation of the new process for councillor visits to frontline services as agreed in the committee in June.
  - The Care Leaver Ambassadors led the local offer mid-term review in June which fed back what action had been taken in response to the feedback provided at the local offer review in November 2024. Feedback from young people was positive and they could see that changes had been made to improve services.
  - The revised My Health Summary designed with young people is now complete and in use. Going forward this will be reviewed on a regular basis through the good health and wellbeing workstream. In 2024/25 100% of care leavers opted to receive their My Health summary around the time of their 18th birthday.
  - Practice guidance for cared for children was received and agreed by policies, procedures and practice (PPP) group on 24 June.

- Flude House Children's Home inspection took place in June with an outcome of good.
- Our second residential home, Cherry Tree House, opened in July 2025.
- The workshop to develop a Charter with registered providers for care experienced young people took place in May from which we have developed a draft Charter for consultation with the registered providers.
- Families First staff events have continued throughout April and June including a partnership session; engaging staff and partners in the reforms and beginning to think about design principles.
- The early help strategy has been agreed by the PPP group and is being prepared for launch.

### **Findings from the second Ofsted monitoring visit**

- 10 Our second Ofsted monitoring visit took place in June 2025 and focused on children in need and child protection. [The findings](#) reflected what we expected inspectors to see and provide assurance that we understand our strengths and areas for development.
- 11 The next monitoring visit is expected to take place in September on cared for children and permanence. Planning is underway to support this.

### **Findings from the sector led improvement partner (SLIP) work**

- 12 Our sector led improvement partner (SLIP), North Tyneside, completed work with our LADO service, cared for service, and quality assurance service over 11-13 August 2025.
- 13 The SLIP found strengths in our support, including:
  - Staff are committed, focused on outcomes for children, and know and care about the children they work with
  - There are many ways the children's voice is heard
  - Recording is developing
  - Evidence of some good quality practice
  - IRO oversight and footprint is improving
  - Improved LADO service in response to the recommendations identified through the SLIP work in April 2025
  - Investment in resources for quality assurance and understanding of the importance of performance and quality assurance.

- 14 We are continuing to work with our SLIP colleagues to support improvements to services. The work with our cared for service has supported our preparation for the next Ofsted monitoring visit which is expected in September 2025.

### **Findings from Councillor visits to frontline services**

- 15 The new arrangements for councillor frontline visits commenced in July 2025 with visits to the cared for service, court team and care leavers service.
- 16 The visits support councillors to understand:
- The quality of frontline practice
  - How we support teams to deliver good quality practice.
- 17 The visits involved:
- Introduction and context from the service manager
  - A one-to-one session with a practitioner
  - A one-to-one session with a team manager
  - A focus group with practitioners.
- 18 The findings are summarised below. These findings are from the conversations between councillors and practitioners during the visits and reflect practitioners' views of their services.
- 19 Strengths:
- Practitioners and managers are dedicated and passionate about working with children and young people. They shared examples of how their work leads to positive outcomes for individuals. There was a genuine desire to improve outcomes.
  - The child's voice is at the centre of practice. The consistency of recording this has improved as everyone is using the same template. The care leaver ambassadors are working with services to shape improvements.
  - The new court team has reduced the workload for the cared for service and prevented interruptions to work that mandatory and short notice court appearances necessitated. The court team is developing specialist expertise in court work.

- Social workers now prepare for supervision meetings which has made the process more efficient. Supervision is regular and focused.
- Support from the virtual school is strong.
- Support from the education, employment and training (EET) team for care leavers was valued.
- Practitioners feel well supported by their managers and colleagues sharing best practice and expertise.
- There were a number of managers and social workers who had worked at the council for more than 10 years and had made progression in their careers and were actively encouraged to do this.
- One agency worker said they enjoyed working at Cheshire East and intended to transfer permanently to the council.

## 20 Areas for development:

- Consistency in the quality of practice, in particular the quality of plans and case summaries.
- Transition for young people is an area where we still need to improve. Personal Advisors (PAs) need to be matched with care leavers earlier to support better transition for young people between the cared for service and care leaver service.
- Strengthening and streamlining work between teams, for example to ensure the court team can start work on cases earlier.
- More local foster carers are needed, especially for sibling groups and children with specific additional needs.
- Some practitioners felt some accommodation for care leavers was not good quality or value for money. Practitioners suggested a care leaver accommodation hub should be developed where care leavers could live together if they wanted to so they could support each other.
- The care leaver hubs and junction 16 app could be improved – purpose-built buildings would work better for the hubs.
- Reintroducing credit cards for PAs for shopping for homewares for care leavers would allow items to be sourced second hand which would be more cost effective and would help the care leaver stretch the budget further.

- Changes in senior leaders, and absence in some key roles, had had an impact on teams and had meant there were a lot of changes introduced.
- Workload pressures. Practitioners reported working long hours, some of which was caused by out of area placements and travel times. Social workers felt they did not have time to attend training and would like specific dedicated time for training. Practitioners identified opportunities where time could be saved – such as simplifying some forms/ processes, training on how to use AI to assist with recording and increasing family workers to support family time for parents and children throughout the court process.
- A review of pay grades in relation to agency staff was suggested to increase recruitment and retention.
- There are a high number of agency staff within the court team and there has been a lot of staffing changes.
- The cared for service felt their working environment could be improved by working in pods or teams. Not all the monitors work and the office can be too hot at times. It would be helpful to have a small private meeting room reserved for the service for confidential conversations.

21 Detailed reports on the findings have been shared with the service managers and head of service, and these will inform service development.

## **Consultation and Engagement**

22 Practitioners' views on improvements are sought through the councillor frontline visits, sector led improvement programme work, Ofsted monitoring visits, and DfE progress reviews. Feedback has also been sought from the councillors who conducted frontline visits to improve and develop the new arrangements.

## **Reasons for Recommendations**

23 Cheshire East Council's children's services received an inadequate judgement in the Ofsted inspection in 2024. The inspection demonstrated that there are areas we need to address at pace to improve outcomes for children. The council needs to ensure the findings from the inspection are addressed in a timely way to ensure we achieve good outcomes for children and young people and councillors need to be assured 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 our children within a reasonable timeframe.

## Other Options Considered

Option	Impact	Risk
Do not scrutinise the improvement plan	Committee will not have oversight of progress against the plan so cannot be assured that outcomes will be improved for children and young people	There is a risk that improvements are not achieved at the pace needed.

## Implications and Comments

### *Monitoring Officer/Legal/Governance*

- 24 This is a further update report for the committee on the children's improvement plan. It is within the committee remit to monitor improvement within the service and ensure compliance with the improvement notice served by the DfE.
- 25 Members of the committee therefore need to be assured that all requirements and recommendations within the ILACS report and the improvement notice (served upon the council by the DfE on the 24 July 2024 resulting from the Ofsted inspection findings), are complied with and that the plans in place deliver the improvements required are within the timescales set by the DfE.
- (a) Failure to comply or poor progress against the Improvement Plan can result in the imposition of directions to secure performance, which can include DfE intervention and nomination of a person to act on its behalf to secure performance.
- 26 The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility. Continued regular oversight by members of the Childrens and Families Committee, alongside the overall approach to improving service provision, aligns with this obligation.

### *Section 151 Officer/Finance*

- 27 The improvement plan to address the findings from the inspection was agreed at the Children and Families Committee on 16 July and Full Council on 17 July, which included the approach to the funding of the plan.
- 28 The overall funding was approved totalling £1.987m across the 2 financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26.

- 29 Included in the FR1 forecast position was an overspend for 2025/26 of £0.8m, a slight reduction to June report. The 2025/26 forecast is £2.2m as detailed in the table below and the combined two-year cost of £2.7m a total overspend of £0.7m.

Expenditure Group	2025/26 Budget (Original Planned)	2025/26 Actuals end of June 25	2025/26 Forecast
Edge of Care Support Workers	£208,100	£0	£164,260
Team Leader	£133,434	£15,741	£104,942
QA Officer	£66,717	-£2,771	£59,104
Project Manager (grade 11) to lead 18-25 accommodation recommission	£66,717	£18,431	£62,806
Connected Care Assessor	£114,702	£24,085	£119,590
Independent Reviewing Officer	£133,434	£29,004	£161,786
Personal Advisor	£124,860	£45,515	£148,404
2.00 FTE Agency Social Worker (initial plan 6.00 FTE Direct Employees)	£344,106	£40,159	£161,943
2.00 FTE Agency Team Managers	£0	£33,989	£170,638
Family Group Conference Support Worker	£166,480	£68,761	£275,041
Children's Home for Children with Complex Mental Health Needs and Challenging Behaviour - design costs and programme document	£0	-£1,292	-£1,292
Head of Service - Integrated Front Door	£0	£38,384	£167,258
Project Lead	£0	£37,255	£121,022
Relationship Support Service	£0	£15,000	£15,000
Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager	£0	£28,220	£141,906
Service Manager - Children with Disabilities	£0	£30,792	£143,551
Specialist Expert Support - External Consultant to work on Health programmes	£0	£30,130	£140,472
Corporate Exc Workstream	£0	£0	£30,000
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>£1,358,550</b>	<b>£451,403</b>	<b>£2,186,432</b>
Original improvement plan			
Original plan item replaced			
Updated plan			

- 30 This overspend is being monitored through the in-year forecast reporting.

### Human Resources

- 31 HR are supporting improvement work and attend and report to each Improvement Board.

### Risk Management

- 32 There are reputational and financial risks to not providing good quality services, as well as risks to individual children and young people. The council must continue to ensure that these risks are mitigated by ensuring effective plans are in place to improve and that these make an impact on children's outcomes.

### Impact on other Committees

- 33 None.

### Policy

	<b>Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing</b>	
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### *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion*

- 34 Good quality practice with families ensures that all children and young people's needs are considered and supported.

### *Other Implications*

- 35 The improvement plan aims to improve the outcomes for our most vulnerable children and young people.

### *Consultation*

<b>Name of Consultee</b>	<b>Post held</b>	<b>Date sent</b>	<b>Date returned</b>
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	13/08/25	02/09/25
Janet Witkowski	Acting Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer	13/08/25	13/08/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Diane Green	Finance Lead Children's	29/07/25	05/08/25
Jennie Summers	Legal Team Manager (People)	29/07/25	04/08/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director of Children's Services	31/07/2025	31/07/2025
Caroline Tote	Interim Director of Commissioning,	29/07/25	29/07/25

	Quality Assurance and Partnerships		
Tracy Stephen	Director of Family Help and Children's Social Care	29/07/25	
Allison Sollom	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	29/07/25	31/07/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	<p>Caroline Tote, Interim Director of Commissioning, Quality Assurance and Partnerships</p> <p><a href="mailto:Caroline.Tote@cheshireeast.gov.uk">Caroline.Tote@cheshireeast.gov.uk</a></p>
Appendices:	<p>Appendix 1: RAG rating overview</p> <p>Appendix 2: Improvement Plan</p> <p>Appendix 3: Changes to improvement plan actions</p> <p>Appendix 4: <a href="#">Ofsted Monitoring Visit Report June 2025</a></p> <p>Appendix 5: Vital Signs Scorecard</p>
Background Papers:	<p><a href="#">Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 9 June 2025</a></p> <p><a href="#">Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 7 April 2025</a></p> <p><a href="#">Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 13 January 2025</a></p> <p><a href="#">Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 11 November 2024</a></p> <p><a href="#">Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 September 2024</a></p>

	<a href="#"><u>Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Report on the Ofsted inspection findings to the Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Cheshire East's Ofsted Inspection Report published 16 May</u></a> <a href="#"><u>Ofsted ILACS Framework</u></a>
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