

OPEN

Children and Families Committee

10 November 2025

Improvement Plan Progress Report

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

Report Reference No: CF/23/25-26

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 councillor visits to frontline services which took place in September 2025.
- 3 The third Ofsted monitoring visit on cared for children, planning and achieving permanence was underway at the time of writing this report. The monitoring visit concluded on 15 October, and the report of the findings is expected to be published on 13 November.

Executive Summary

- 4 We are continuing to make progress in delivering our improvement plan; since the [last report to committee](#) in September, the percentage of actions completed has increased from 49% to 56%.
- 5 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. This report includes the findings from the councillor visits to frontline services which took place in September 2025.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Children and Families Committee is recommended to:

1. Note the progress against the improvement plan.
2. Note the findings from the councillor visits to the cared for IRO service, child protection chair and LADO service and family group conferencing team in September 2025.

Background

- 6 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

- 7 The improvement plan at Appendix 2 was updated on 30 September 2025. Appendix 1 shows an overview of the RAG ratings for each action.
- 8 Key improvement activity which has taken place since the last update to committee includes:
- The member development training programme was approved at the Audit and Governance Committee; corporate parenting is included annually from September for all councillors as mandatory training.
 - A new child in need and child protection plan was launched on 11 August. Training was delivered to support the plan roll out and feedback on the new plan has been positive.
 - A new permanence tracker and panel has been put in place over August which will strengthen our approach to achieving permanence.
 - The Care Leaver Ambassadors have filmed videos to support other young people with advice and information for when they move into their first homes.
 - The Care Leaver Health Group is working on developing sleep packs for unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people as national evidence suggests this is a significant factor in good mental health for this cohort. The focus of the September Good Health and Wellbeing Workstream is emotional health of cared for children including unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people.

- Proactive Support resources are fully launched, over 300 individuals accessed the website in June alone with over 800 individual hits. Feedback so far has been positive, and resources have been adopted (and adapted where required) by Place teams across the broader Cheshire and Merseyside sub-region.
- The early help strategy has been launched and is available across the partnership.
- Attendance at our Summer Designated Teacher training days was very good and the training on offer was really well received, particularly around the sessions on improving the quality of personal education plans (PEPs).
- Additional HR capacity has now been secured to work alongside the Children's Services leadership team.
- An audit on emergency accommodation reviewed 12 care leavers identified at risk of homelessness or who were homeless in the last 3 months. 11 of the 12 cases were rated good which demonstrates our support in this area has significantly improved.

Findings from Councillor visits to frontline services

- 9 This report covers the findings from the second round of visits which took place in September to the Cared for IRO Service, Child Protection Chair and LADO Service and Family Group Conferencing Service.
- 10 A visit was unable to be arranged to the Safeguarding Children in Educational Settings (SCiES) team. This visit will take place in the next round of visits in November.
- 11 The visits support councillors to understand:
 - The quality of frontline practice
 - How we support teams to deliver good quality practice.
- 12 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

- Feedback discussion with the service manager and head of service.

13 The findings are summarised below.

14 Strengths:

- Strong, trusting relationships are built with children and families, which support change.
- Children's voices are sought and children are supported to be involved in their plans.
- Practitioners and managers are knowledgeable, experienced and passionate about improving outcomes for children, and articulated the improvements that had been made to services since the ILACS inspection in February and March 2024.
- The Family Group Conferencing Service has doubled in size since April, allowing all children on child protection plans to receive support from the service, which is having a positive impact on supporting children to stay within their family networks.
- The new IRO resolution policy uses a restorative approach to resolving issues.
- The new child in need and child protection plan is more accessible for families and was positively received by Ofsted.
- The LADO service is now fully staffed and improvements have been made to the service since the work with our sector led improvement partner in April 2025.
- The new post of the Director for Quality Assurance, Partnerships and Commissioning was welcomed by teams. Teams were positive about the support they received from their managers and head of service.
- Teams noted a positive change in culture with more openness and honesty.

15 Areas for development:

- Restorative practice is still embedding and is not yet used consistently in all areas.
- Family Group Conferences could be held earlier with families to provide earlier help and support.

- Some referrals to LADO don't require LADO involvement, support is needed for partners to increase confidence and understanding in this area.
- Challenges with the Unit4 system impact on timescales for recruitment.
- The LiquidLogic system can be unreliable; sometimes going down during work hours.
- Teams raised the need for dedicated space within offices to have private conversations.

Consultation and Engagement

- 16 Practitioners' views on improvements are sought through the councillor frontline visits, sector led improvement programme work, Ofsted monitoring visits, and DfE progress reviews. Feedback was sought from the councillors who conducted frontline visits in July which informed changes to improve the arrangements for the visits in September.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 17 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

- 18 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.
- 19 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.
- 20 The protection of vulnerable people is a council responsibility. Continued regular oversight by members of the Children and Families Committee, alongside the overall approach to improving service provision, aligns with this obligation.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

- 21 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.
- 22 The overall funding was approved totalling £1.987m across the 2 financial years 2024/25 and 2025/26 with an additional £13.4k budget increasing the total budget to £2.000m
- 23 Included in the FR2 forecast position was an overspend for 2025/26 of £0.467m. The 2025/26 forecast is £1.923m as detailed in the table below and the combined two year cost of £2.467m.

Expenditure Group	2025/26 Budget (Original Planned)	2025/26 Actuals End of August	2025/26 Forecast
Edge of Care Support Workers	£208,100	£0	£0
Team Leader	£133,434	£26,997	£66,287
QA Officer	£66,717	£15,273	£60,932
Project Manager (grade 11) to lead 18-25 accommodation recommission	£66,717	£30,761	£67,512
Connected Care Assessor	£114,702	£34,351	£82,668
Independent Reviewing Officer	£133,434	£58,397	£166,666
Personal Advisor	£124,860	£68,558	£150,022
2.00 FTE Agency Social Worker (initial plan 6.00 FTE Direct Employees	£344,106	£68,242	£165,975
2.00 FTE Agency Team Managers	£0	£65,348	£180,069
Family Group Conference Support Worker	£166,480	£104,737	£263,562
Specialist Expert Support	£0	£0	£0
Specialist Expert Support - External Consultant to work on Health programmes	£0	£52,898	£147,874
Service Manager - Children with Disabilities	£0	£58,437	£136,116
Specialist Expert Support - Dorset Council Peer Review of Front Door	£0	£0	£0
Children's Home for Children with Complex Mental Health Needs and Challenging Behaviour - c	£0	£-1,292	£-1,292
Executive Assistant to the Improvement Programme	£0	£0	£0
Head of Service - Integrated Front Door	£0	£66,557	£157,628
Project Lead	£0	£63,769	£87,758
Relationship Support Service	£0	£15,000	£15,000
Safeguarding Quality Assurance Manager	£0	£43,230	£137,153
Specialist Capital Consultant	£0	£0	£9,000
Childrens Staff Event	£0	£250	£250
Childrens Improvement Plan Workstream x 3	£0	£0	£30,000
Grand Total	£1,358,550	£771,514	£1,923,179

24 This position continues to be monitored through in-year forecast reporting.

Human Resources

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

Risk Management

26 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

27 None.

Policy

	Commitment 2: Improving health and wellbeing	
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Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

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

Other Implications

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

Consultation

Name of Consultee	Post held	Date sent	Date returned
<i>Statutory Officer (or deputy) :</i>			
Ashley Hughes	S151 Officer	20/10/25	21/10/25
Kevin O'Keefe	Governance, Compliance and Monitoring Officer	20/10/25	20/10/25
<i>Legal and Finance</i>			
Diane Green	Finance Lead Children's	13/10/25	16/10/25
Tessa Williams	Interim Principal Child Care Lawyer (People Team)	16/10/25	17/10/25
<i>Other Consultees:</i>			
<i>Executive Directors/Directors</i>			
Dawn Godfrey	Executive Director of Children's Services	20/10/25	20/10/25
Caroline Tote	Interim Director of Quality,	13/10/25	20/10/25

	Partnerships and Commissioning		
Vonni Gordon	Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning	13/10/25	14/10/25

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Vonni Gordon, Director of Quality, Partnerships and Commissioning Vonni.Gordon@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	Appendix 1: RAG rating overview Appendix 2: Improvement Plan Appendix 3: Changes to improvement plan actions Appendix 4: Vital Signs Scorecard
Background Papers:	Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 15 September 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 9 June 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 7 April 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 13 January 2025 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 11 November 2024 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 September 2024 Report on the improvement plan to the Children and Families Committee on 16 July 2024 Report on the Ofsted inspection findings to the Children and Families Committee on 3 June 2024

	<u>Cheshire East's Ofsted Inspection Report published 16 May</u> <u>Ofsted ILACS Framework</u>
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