

Cheshire East
Children and Young People's
Improvement Plan
to meet the Ofsted Recommendations



Creating a
great place to
be young



Progress Report July 2016

Improvement Progress Report July 2016

Overview of this Report:

This report reviews our progress to date against the recommendations from the Ofsted inspection; we are now one year on from the inspection period. This report evaluates where our key areas are for further development in order to inform the new improvement plan for November 2016-17.

Overview of the Quality of Services:

Children are safe in Cheshire East, and there is good quality practice taking place with families. Audits show that thresholds are being applied appropriately at ChECS (97%), and social workers are effectively identifying and challenging safeguarding concerns (95%), and taking the right action at the right time to protect children (94%). Action by social workers and other professionals is resulting in improved outcomes for our children and young people in the vast majority of cases (86%).

Children are being seen regularly (89%), and their views and wishes are reflected in assessments and plans (80%). The number of children being taken into care has increased, with the number of children on section 20 decreasing, this is now down to 14% in June 2016 from 18% in April 2016, which is further evidence that the protection system is operating effectively.

Overall, the majority of our social work practice requires improvement (66%) with some good practice (22%). We have high aspirations for our children and young people, and we continue to relentlessly drive improvements and scrutinise practice to continually learn, reflect and develop our services further.

There is evidence of much higher proportions of good practice when considering specific elements of work, for example the majority of child protection plans in the last audit were judged to be of good quality (64%) and 46% of plans for cared for children were judged as good quality.

In terms of overall judgements, the quality of casework has remained at roughly the same level over the last 12 months. Requires improvement is a broad category in terms of the quality of work it covers, so it will take time before we see a significant shift in terms of the quality of work. This broad category is screening significant improvements that have been achieved; new processes within teams have been introduced this year, and arrangements for driving progress and monitoring and tracking outcomes for children and young people are now much tighter than they were during and prior to the inspection.

Significant Improvements Achieved:

- Action by social workers and other professionals is resulting in **improved outcomes for our children and young people in the vast majority of cases** (86%).
- **Children are being seen regularly** (89%), and their **views and wishes are reflected** in assessments and plans (80%).
- There is **good quality work at the front door**. ChECS show a clear trajectory of progress, and around 50% of work within ChECS is good or outstanding. Thresholds are being applied consistently (97%), there is clear management oversight (100%) and decisions are informed by information from partners (80%) and family history (100%).
- **More assessments are good quality** (37% combined assessments, 40% assessments for cared for children).
- The **majority of child protection plans are good quality** (64%), and **more plans are good quality for cared for children** (46%).
- The **quality of PEPs has significantly improved** in terms of the standard of PEP completion, and improvement in the quality of targets set by the school (90%).
- **Managers are scrutinising work** and that there is evidence to support this in their authorisation of plans (88%) and direction upon the allocation of work (98%). The quality of management decision making in the Permanence and ThroughCare Team has significantly improved from a low of 45% in Q2 to 80% in Q4.
- **Step up is appropriate**
- The **timeliness of requests from children's social care for initial health assessments has significantly improved**, from 4% within timescale in Q1 to 88% in June 2016, resulting in improvements in the timeliness of completion of the assessments, from a low of 12% in Q4 to 57% in June 2016.
- **Later in life letters are now being produced to a good standard** and processes are in place to quality assure these and support consistency.
- This year we have **nearly doubled the number of privately fostered children** and young people we are aware of in Cheshire East due to awareness raising activity.
- **We have significantly strengthened monitoring arrangements within children's social care**, including but not limited to the Safeguarding Performance Challenge Sessions and scrutiny of children and young people subject to a CP plan for more than 12 months, introducing the permanence case tracking meeting, and the tracker for care leavers in unsuitable accommodation.
- **Key strategic posts within Children and Families have been filled** and are driving improvements to and join up between services, and effective scrutiny, monitoring and challenge.
- **Recruitment and retention** continues to be a challenge to our services, but we have a robust recruitment and retention strategy in place and this is attracting the right people to work in Cheshire East.
- **Cheshire East's LSCB has achieved an Investing in Children Membership Award** this year for listening and engaging with children and young people. Two of our other services also hold this award – the Safeguarding Children in Educational

Ofsted recommendations that we can demonstrate we have fully met:

We can demonstrate that we have made fully met the following recommendations:

- *11. Improve the implementation of delegated authority so that carers are clear about what decisions they can make and children do not experience delays.*
- *17. Ensure later-in-life letters provide details of all known information, are written in plain English, and are accessible to children so that they understand their stories.*
- *13. Ensure audit arrangements have a sharper focus on looked after children.*
- *14. Ensure that comprehensive and clear data and performance information are provided to managers and strategic leaders to enable them to better understand, oversee and scrutinise performance. This includes ensuring the accuracy of the information provided through the electronic recording system so that managers have effective oversight of frontline practice.*
- *16. Strengthen commissioning arrangements to ensure that services meet the needs of families and children in need of help and protection and children looked after by:*
 - *Reviewing the use of foyer accommodation for 16-17 year olds*
 - *Ensuring that rigorous risk assessments are undertaken before the placement of young people in foyer or hostel accommodation, and review the practice of using this provision*
 - *care leavers who are homeless*
 - *private fostering and connected persons' arrangements to ensure that these arrangements are suitable and comply with regulations*
 - *Ensuring sufficient health provision for older looked after children and care leavers*
 - *Increasing the capacity of advocacy services to support children and young people identified as in need.*
- *151: Complete work to develop the LSCB performance management framework so that service effectiveness can be evaluated rigorously across all agencies*
- *152a: Provide regular scrutiny of services for looked after children.*
- *154. Develop links with the Local Family Justice Board so that CESCIB can monitor how well the needs of children in public and private law proceedings are met.*
- *156: Improve the influence of CESCIB in the work of the Health and Wellbeing Board to ensure that safeguarding is embedded within its priorities.*
- *158: Implement a protocol that outlines when the National Panel should be notified about SCRs and incidents in order to strengthen scrutiny of decision-making.*

These will now be monitored through existing business as usual processes, subject to agreement from the Health and Wellbeing Board, and will no longer be monitored

through the Improvement Plan for 2016-17. A self-evaluation against all the Ofsted recommendations will be undertaken in July 2017.

Ofsted recommendations we will monitor for sustained impact:

For a number of recommendations, activity has been undertaken which has resulted in improved performance. As we cannot yet be assured that impact is sustained, performance will remain monitored over the next six months for the following recommendations:

- *15. Ensure that learning from complaints leads to clear action plans and that these are implemented, tracked and reviewed to inform and improve practice.*
- *1. Strengthen senior managers' oversight and monitoring of:*
 - *complex cases where there are historic drift and delay in taking decisive action*
- *12. Improve the timeliness of initial health assessments so that children who become looked after have their own health needs assessed within the expected timescales.*
- *155: Review the arrangements for monitoring the quality of private fostering work.*

Activity to meet these recommendations will not be included within the Improvement Plan for 2016-17, as performance indicates the action already undertaken is resulting in the improvements needed. Performance in these areas will be continued to be monitored as part of the new plan and action will be taken if performance and impact is not sustained.

The next phase in our continual development:

Some of the recommendations are regarding the core elements of practice. As discussed earlier, requires improvement is a broad category, in order to achieve good services we need a whole service culture change to one that puts children and young people first. This is more difficult to achieve than the compliance we achieved in our first phase of improvement. Based on inspections in other authorities, it is estimated that improvement from requires improvement to good takes about three years to achieve.

As we move into the next phase of our service development, we will be moving away from the recommendations prescribed by Ofsted to focus on the areas that we know are our key areas for improvement. All the Ofsted recommendations which are outstanding will remain referenced to our key areas, but we feel it is important to be driving and shaping developments to our own narrative, and focusing this around our mission to put children and young people first in our services. A self-evaluation against the recommendations will be completed at the end of next year (July 2017) to ensure our progress against these is evaluated and documented.

This year we will be implementing a new delivery model for children's social care to change the culture of our work to one that puts children and young people first.

Implementing strength-based delivery models has been shown to be effective in other local authorities in achieving culture change, improving outcomes for children and young people, reducing the number of children brought into care, and reducing demand to higher level services. We are confident that will provide the step and culture change we need to achieve consistently good quality services.

We are also implementing a targeted approach to improvement across the partnership to develop a shared culture and ambition for children and young people in Cheshire East, and improve the quality, consistency and ownership of partnership work. This approach will focus on key practice areas each month under a shared quarterly theme, and will act as a campaign for change within agencies to raise awareness of good practice and expectations, and provide professionals with the mandate and support to challenge instances of poor practice.

Areas for Improvement for 2016-17:

We need to ensure our services put children and young people first, and understand their daily lived experience. We need to work inclusively with our families - being clear about what impact situations are having on children and young people, what intervention will entail, and what we want to achieve together with them to improve outcomes for our children and young people.

We want to ensure that all our children and young people achieve good outcomes, and that families can sustain these outcomes once services are no longer involved. Supporting families to take responsibility, support each other through wider family networks, and develop the skills to solve their own problems and keep their children safe will be a key element of the new delivery model.

Our key areas for development are given overleaf along with the links to the Ofsted recommendations.

Area	Link to Recommendation
Quality of management oversight, support and challenge: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Putting children and young people first - leading good practice and challenging delays o Recording management directions and rationale for decisions o Good quality supervision which evaluates CPD and links to PDPs 	<p><i>3. Ensure that supervision is reflective, challenging and consistently focuses on continual professional development.</i></p> <p><i>6. Improve the quality of recording so that all key discussions and decisions about children and their families, including management oversight, are clearly recorded.</i></p>
Quality of social work practice: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Putting children and young people first – demonstrating an understanding of their lived experience o Focused and purposeful work, and SMART plans 	<p><i>6. Improve the quality of recording so that all key discussions and decisions about children and their families, including management oversight, are clearly recorded.</i></p> <p><i>7. Strengthen frontline practice to ensure</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Analysis of the salient issues and recording rationale for decisions ○ Plans have clear contingencies ○ Linking direct work to the plan ○ Using history to inform decisions and assessments ○ Updating assessments in response to new information, e.g. return home interviews ○ Professional curiosity and continual questioning ○ High ambition for children and young people ○ Concise recording ○ Timeliness of private fostering and connected persons arrangements 	<p><i>effective action is taken to support children at risk of child sexual exploitation and those who go missing.</i></p> <p><i>8. Ensure assessments for children in need of help and protection and children looked after are timely, consistently consider the full range of children's needs, contain thorough analysis and are routinely updated to reflect changes in circumstances.</i></p> <p><i>9. Ensure that plans to help children in need of help and protection, looked after children, and care leavers, are specific, clear, outcome-focused and include timescales and contingencies so that families and professionals understand what needs to happen to improve circumstances for children. This includes improving the clarity of letters before proceedings so that the expectations of parents are clear.</i></p>
<p>Involving families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Hearing the voice of children and young people ○ Involving families in creating the plan and identifying strengths ○ Demonstrating the views of children and young people, parents and carers on the salient issues ○ Clear communication on why we are involved and what needs to change ○ Timely information sharing ○ Working with the whole family and wider network ○ Plans are clearly evaluated ○ We are creative in our approach to support families ○ We seek feedback from and listen to families on what our areas for improvement are and take action ○ Use of family group conferencing 	<p><i>16. Strengthen commissioning arrangements to ensure that services meet the needs of families and children in need of help and protection and children looked after by:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Improving the use of family group conferences so that all possible options for children are consistently explored</i>
<p>Quality of oversight, support and challenge from IROs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Putting children and young people first - leading good practice and challenging delays ○ Evaluating the impact of Practice Alerts ○ 	<p><i>2. Ensure the challenge provided by child protection chairs and independent reviewing officers (IRO) addresses drift and improves planning for children</i></p>
<p>Involving key professionals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ In strategy discussions 	<p><i>5. Ensure that strategy meetings and decisions are informed by relevant</i></p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> o In communication – including GPs o In multi-agency meetings o In evaluating plans o Improving the join up with adult services o Addressing gaps between services 	<i>partner agencies.</i>
Using the right tools: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Graded care profile o CSE screening tool o Toxic Trio Assessment tool 	<i>153. Evaluate the impact of the neglect strategy and disseminate the findings to help agencies improve their practice.</i>
Good early help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Families receive a service when they need it o CAFs are good quality o We have a good early help offer which meets the needs of our families 	<i>4. Ensure that where children do not meet the threshold for social work intervention their circumstances are considered promptly and they receive appropriate and timely early help.</i>
Sustainable outcomes and robust step down	<i>10. Ensure that decisions to step down or close cases are appropriate and that management rationale to do so is clearly recorded.</i>
Joint Strategy for Female Genital Mutilation	<i>157: Develop and implement a coordinated strategy in relation to female genital mutilation so that the impact of multi-agency work within Cheshire East can be evaluated and understood.</i>
Strengthen work to tackle Neglect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Use of the graded care profile o Evaluation of the neglect strategy 	<i>153. Evaluate the impact of the neglect strategy and disseminate the findings to help agencies improve their practice.</i>

Partnership Improvement:

Improvements to partnership working will be owned and driven by the LSCB. The LSCB has agreed four key priorities for 2016-18:

- 1. Implementation of the neglect strategy**
- 2. Improving the effectiveness of Child Protection Conferences**
- 3. Improving the Board's role and traction in relation to early help**
- 4. Delivery and scrutiny of the children and young people's improvement plan.**

The partnership improvement and development plan will sit within the LSCB Business Plan, and progress will be driven and scrutinised by the LSCB. Areas that will be led by the LSCB are included overleaf.

Area	Link to Recommendation
<p>Quality of partnership practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Putting children and young people first – demonstrating an understanding of their lived experience o Focused and purposeful work, and SMART plans o Analysis of the salient issues and recording rationale for decisions o Plans have clear contingencies o Linking direct work to the plan o Using history to inform decisions and assessments o Updating assessments in response to new information, e.g. return home interviews o Professional curiosity and continual questioning o High ambition for children and young people 	<p><i>9. Ensure that plans to help children in need of help and protection, looked after children, and care leavers, are specific, clear, outcome-focused and include timescales and contingencies so that families and professionals understand what needs to happen to improve circumstances for children. This includes improving the clarity of letters before proceedings so that the expectations of parents are clear.</i></p>
<p>Involving families:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Hearing the voice of children and young people o Involving families in creating the plan and identifying strengths o Demonstrating the views of children and young people, parents and carers on the salient issues o Clear communication on why we are involved and what needs to change o Timely information sharing o Working with the whole family and wider network o Plans are clearly evaluated o We are creative in our approach to support families o We seek feedback from and listen to families on what our areas for improvement are and take action 	
<p>Involving key professionals:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o In strategy discussions o In communication – including GPs o In multi-agency meetings o In evaluating plans o Improving the join up with adult services o Addressing gaps between services 	<p><i>5. Ensure that strategy meetings and decisions are informed by relevant partner agencies.</i></p>
<p>Using the right tools:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Graded care profile o CSE screening tool o Toxic Trio Assessment tool 	<p><i>153. Evaluate the impact of the neglect strategy and disseminate the findings to help agencies improve their practice.</i></p>

Good early help <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Families receive a service when they need it o CAFs are good quality o We have a good early help offer which meets the needs of our families 	4. Ensure that where children do not meet the threshold for social work intervention their circumstances are considered promptly and they receive appropriate and timely early help.
Sustainable outcomes and robust step down	10. Ensure that decisions to step down or close cases are appropriate and that management rationale to do so is clearly recorded.
Joint Strategy for Female Genital Mutilation	157: Develop and implement a coordinated strategy in relation to female genital mutilation so that the impact of multi-agency work within Cheshire East can be evaluated and understood.
Strengthen work to tackle Neglect <ul style="list-style-type: none"> o Use of the graded care profile o Evaluation of the neglect strategy 	153. Evaluate the impact of the neglect strategy and disseminate the findings to help agencies improve their practice.
Application of thresholds	152b: Monitor and review the application by partner agencies of the threshold framework and take appropriate action where necessary

Next Steps:

Engagement with staff and partners, and other key stakeholders, will take place in Autumn to inform the development of the new plan for 2016-17. This plan will be informed by feedback from children, young people and parents/ carers – the key areas they want to see improve and how they want us to support them.