

# Early Help and Children's Social Care Improvement and Impact Plan

September 2023 - 2024



# Foreword

Cheshire East Council is **highly ambitious** in the delivery of its statutory services to children and young people. We believe that all children in the borough deserve the very best opportunities to support them to succeed to adulthood and realise their potential.

For a **small but significantly vulnerable** group of children and young people early help and prevention and statutory safeguarding services are provided to mitigate harm, increase safety, and support children to progress in all aspects of their life, in the context of the circumstances they came from.

We want to be **consistent** in our approach whilst being **flexible** enough to respond to individual circumstances. The improvement and impact plan will drive practice improvements and will be governed by an improvement and impact board which will **evaluate of the impact** of improvements on frontline practice and outcomes for children and young people.

We will improve our practice to ensure that children are safer as a result of the help that they receive. Alongside this our refreshed process of live self-evaluation will **identify weaknesses** in

practice and enable leaders to develop **credible plans** to take clear and appropriate **action** to address this.

As leaders we are clear in our responsibilities for:

- helping and protecting children and young people
- the experiences and progress of children in care wherever they live, including children who return home
- arrangements for permanency for children who are looked after, including adoption
- the experiences and progress of care leavers
- the effectiveness of leaders and managers, and the impact they have on the lives of children and young people
- the quality of professional practice.

This improvement and impact plan will **tackle delay** and **improve practice** by giving greater visibility to **what we know** about the lived experiences of children and young people, being curious about **how we know** this and the validity of this information and having a clear plan to address areas for continuous improvement. Individual service plans will set out the actions in more detail.

Our improvement and impact board will be accountable to the corporate safeguarding accountabilities group and our committees.

# 12-month improvement and impact plan

## Current Performance

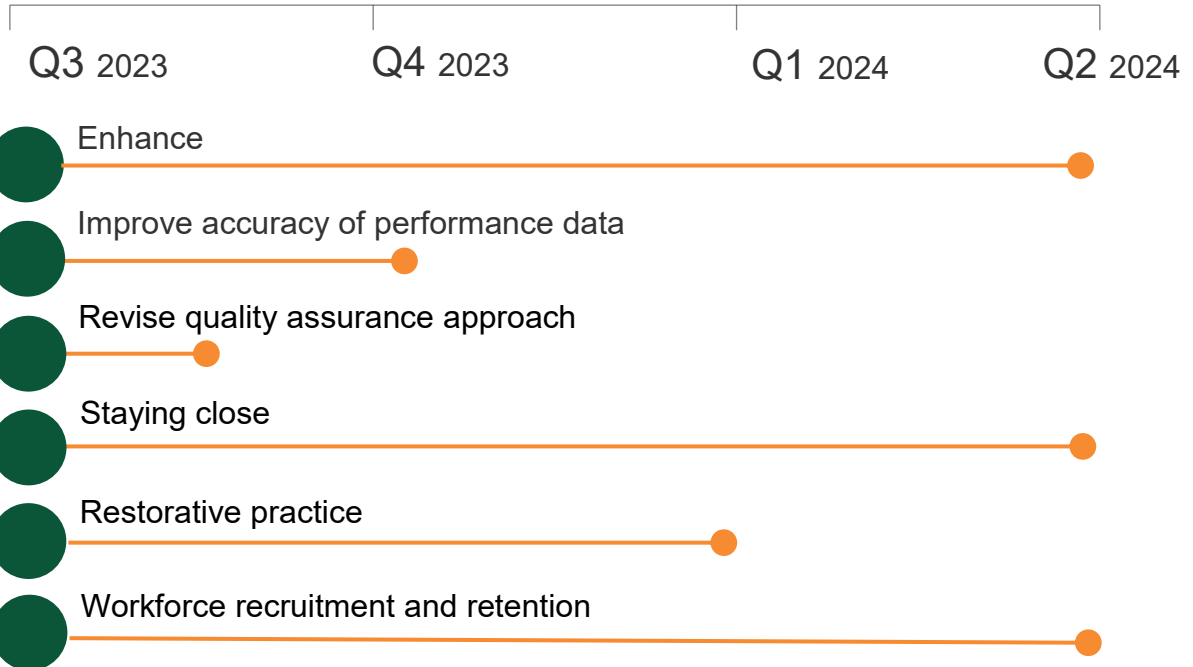
### Performance

In Cheshire East, at quarter 1 2023/24 (Q1) we had:

- 1179 children and young people with early help assessments or plans
- 2031 children in need
- 190 children and young people on a child protection plan
- 576 cared for children, of which 55 are UASC
- 259 former relevant care leavers aged 17-21, of which 58 are UASC.

The latest children's social care audit (in the first 5 months of 2023/24 found that:

- 68% cases (20 cases) were good
- 36% required improvement (11 cases)
- 6% were inadequate (2 cases).



# Improvement and Impact Plan

<b>Objective of Plan</b>	Improve the quality and consistency of frontline practice and measurable impact for children and young people
<b>Plan Owner</b>	Kerry Birtles – Director of Early Help and Children’s Social Care

Pillars	How will we succeed?	Impact/KPIs
<p>High quality and timely <b>assessments</b> and <b>plans</b> lead to improved outcomes.</p> <p>Effective <b>leadership</b> and <b>management</b> leading to consistency in frontline practice.</p> <p>Achieve compliance with <b>statutory/legal</b> obligations.</p> <p><b>Integrated services</b> delivering holistic services to meet the needs of children, families and communities.</p>	<p>Using lead practitioners to address areas of underperformance and poor quality.</p> <p>Supporting leaders to be accountable for their role in quality and compliance.</p> <p>Supporting the frontline to be confident in their knowledge and implementation of quality and compliance.</p> <p>Creating greater consistency and measurable impact in frontline practice.</p>	<p>Assessments will be timely and quality assurance dip samples will evidence more good practice and less inadequate practice.</p> <p>Management oversight will be consistently visible and lead to timely and quality decisions.</p> <p>Key performance indicators (KPIs) - 90% achieved for all compliance measures/margins understood and management oversight in place.</p> <p>More timely interventions with a focus on exit destinations and sustained change.</p>

**Children and young people are listened to, practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings.**

# Improvement and Impact Plan

## 1. Early intervention and prevention

### Overall Effectiveness

Children, young people and families are offered help when needs and/or concerns are first identified. The early help improves the child's situation and supports sustainable progress. The interface between early help and statutory work is clearly and effectively differentiated.

Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
1.1	Early help improves the child's situation and supports sustainable progress	Coproduce a set of practice and performance standards with children's social care which are explicit about the purpose and impact of the family help service.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	Sept 2023
1.2		Develop performance reporting for the family help service to evaluate compliance with the practice standards.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention Business Intelligence Manager	Oct 2023
1.3		Integrate quality assurance activity with children's social care to evidence the impact of intervention and sustainable progress.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	Jan 2024
1.4		Recruit to a family networking service to prevent families' needs from escalating and to support children and young people to make sustainable connections with their communities.	Principal Social Worker	Jan 2024
1.5	The interface between early help and statutory services is clear and effective.	Embed the new thresholds guidance across the partnership.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	Nov 2023
1.6	Professionals understand thresholds and make	Increase the amount of early help work completed by partners through support from the practitioner family help officers and appropriate challenge through tracking children who are stepped down to partner agencies.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	Jan 2024

1.7	appropriate referrals to children's social care and are able to access social work expertise and advice.  Timely and effective response to referrals.	Track and monitor the timeliness of decision making in the integrated front door through weekly performance clinics.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention  Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	Weekly
1.8		Evaluate effectiveness of decision making, including step down, and continue to strengthen the quality and consistency of practice through the bi-weekly multi-agency audit in the front door.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention  Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	Quarterly reports to the Improvement and Impact Board from November 2023 (Q2)
1.9		Recruit a dedicated mental health worker in the front door to provide specialist knowledge and advice around mental health needs and support a graduated response to meeting needs.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	Dec 2023

## 2. Help and Protection

Overall effectiveness		Identifying and responding to children's needs appropriately. Making good decisions and providing timely and effective help.		
Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
2.1	Professionals identify children and young people in need of help and protection.	See actions 1.5-1.8		
2.2		Develop and roll out partnership training on consent, engagement and having difficult conversations.	Head of Service Early Help and Prevention	Oct 2023

	Timely and effective response to referrals.		Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	
2.3		Dip sample management oversight on contacts to strengthen recording the rationale for decision making.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	Fortnightly
2.4	Timely and effective response to referrals out of hours.	Audit contacts to EDT including availability of response, quality, and timeliness of service delivery.	Service Manager Integrated Front Door	Quarterly
2.5	Timely, effective response to referrals to the designated officer. Allegations of abuse, mistreatment or poor practice by professionals and carers are taken seriously.	The Cheshire East Safeguarding Children's Partnership (CESCP) to provide support and challenge to the Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) role, its function and impact.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Annual
2.6	Child protection enquiries are thorough and lead to timely action, which reduces the risk of harm to children.	Continue to improve the timeliness of Initial Child Protection Conferences (ICPC).	Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	Oct 2023
2.7		Scrutinise the length and impact of child protection plans via quality assurance activity.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Nov 2023
2.8	Assessments are timely, dynamic and change in light of emerging issues and risks, informed by historical context (children's journeys and contingency plans) and significant events.	Provide targeted support to frontline teams to improve the focus on histories and contingency plans.	Principal Social Worker	Monthly
2.9		Hold weekly performance clinics to address the timeliness of visits, assessments and plans.	Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	Jan 2024



	Plans are dynamic and change in the light of emerging issues. Direct support is offered as a result of effective assessment and planning leading to sustained change.  Action is taken to avoid drift and delay.			
2.10	Children and young people are protected through effective multi-agency arrangements. Key partners attend multi-agency meetings where timely information sharing, planning, decision making and monitoring takes place to reduce risk.	Improve the quality and effectiveness of strategy discussions  Ensure partners are invited to attend multi-agency meetings	Head of Child Protection and Child in Need  Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	Oct 2023  Oct 2023
2.11	Social workers recognise the factors that can make children more vulnerable and tailor interventions more appropriately, including children with disabilities, private fostering, children not attending school, vulnerable adolescents,	Deliver training to frontline colleagues around factors which increase vulnerability for children and young people, including those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND).	Principal Social Worker CESCP Training & Development Manager	Jan 2024
2.12		Embed the work of the Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO) to ensure high quality early help and social care input and engagement with the education, health and care (EHC) needs assessment and planning process.	Designated Social Care Officer (DCSO)	November 2023
2.13		Ensure a lead champion is in place for private fostering and audit the experiences of young people on a quarterly basis.	Service Manager CIN/CP	Quarterly monitoring



	radicalisation, exploitation and gangs.	Private Fostering assessments will be completed within the same timescales of a C&F assessment and will tracked by Team Managers in the same way to increase the timeliness of assessments.		
2.14		Ensure a lead champion is in place for care leavers accessing emergency accommodation and audit the experiences of young people on a quarterly basis.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Quarterly monitoring
2.15		Develop the process in Liquid Logic for service manager or head of service oversight of private fostering assessments to support consistency in practice.	Business Intelligence Team	Dec 2023
2.16		Running a private fostering awareness campaign across the partnership to ensure private fostering arrangements are recognised and children and young people receive appropriate support.	Service Manager CIN/CP CЕСCP Training & Development Manager	TBC
2.17		Regularly update the JTAI improvement plan to reflect the response of the partnership in relation to all forms of exploitation.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Monthly monitoring
2.18		Review our processes to improve how we prepare young people for adulthood and support the transition between children's and adults' services.	Service Manager CINCP Designated Social Care Officer (DSCO)	Jan 2024
2.19		Improving the quality and impact of practice, ensuring themes from return home interviews are addressed within plans, and increasing young people attending trigger meetings and helping develop their plans.	Interim Service Manager Cared for/ Contextual Safeguarding	Dec 2023
2.20		Understanding why cared for children decline return home interviews through the cared for children's survey.	Interim Service Manager Cared for/ Contextual Safeguarding	Nov 2023
2.21	Effective and timely planning, support and decision making takes	Follow the recommendations and complete the actions from the Public Law Outline (PLO) peer review.	Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	Quarterly Monitoring

	place during pre-proceedings work.			
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### 3. Cared for children

Overall effectiveness		The experience and progress of children in care. Making good decisions and providing timely and effective help. Providing stability and permanence.		
Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
3.1	Children and young people become looked after in a timely way and in their best interests, based on clear, effective, comprehensive and risk-based assessments involving professionals.	Track and monitor any delays being experienced from Legal Advice Meetings (LAM) to the issue of care proceedings, and ensure appropriate plans are in place to avoid these.	Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	Oct 2023
3.2		Ensure there are senior management observations and oversight of LAM.	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care	Oct 2023
3.3	Supporting children to achieve rehabilitation ensuring purposeful work is carried out with the family.	Provide additional investment into edge of care and the @ct team, targeting children with multiple vulnerability indicators, to offer additional support for rehabilitation.	Head of Service Child Protection and Child in Need	January 2024
3.4	There are a wide range and choice of placements available to meet the needs of children in care.	Review the sufficiency strategy and report to the November Children and Families committee for endorsement, giving forensic examination to the needs of our cared for population now and in the future.	Head of Service Integrated Commissioning Head of Service Children's Provision	January 2024

3.5		Developing our own in-house residential provision and continuing to improve opportunities for children and young people to live closer to home.	Head of Service Children's Provision	April 2024
3.6		Improving our internal foster care capacity and retention through marketing, streamlining and tracking our application process.	Head of Service Children's Provision Fostering Service Manager	Jan 2024
3.7		Recruiting a placements manager and coordinator as a joint role between children's social care and commissioning to deliver our sufficiency strategy, quality assure placements, and build relationships with providers and develop the market.	Head of Service Integrated Commissioning Head of Service Children's Provision	Oct 2023
3.8	Suitable and timely plans for permanence are made for children and young people to live away from their family if a return home is not possible.	Endorse and complete the actions within the Local Family Justice Board (LFJB) action plan.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	Quarterly
3.9		Develop practice standards for IROs to ensure that suitable and timely plans are made for children and young people, specifically including permanence at second reviews, and that is clear in expectations for 16+ in relation to planning for the transition to independence.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Nov 2023
3.10	Assessments of family members as potential carers are carried out promptly and to a good standard.	Develop a family group networking service to ensure families are involved in planning and developing strong, resilient support networks around children and young people.	Principal Social Worker	Jan 2024
3.11	Children in care and care leavers are helped to understand their rights and entitlements and know how to give feedback.	Annual advocacy and IV report to be accountable to the ILACS improvement and impact board.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Nov 2023
3.12	Children and young	Participation team to review 'coming into care' information for children and young people	Youth Support Manager	Oct 2023

3.13	people have access to an advocate and independent visitor (IV) when needed.	Ensure all children receive material or are afforded the opportunity to understand their rights and entitlements.	Youth Support Manager	Oct 2023
3.14		Increase the membership of My VOICE to ensure it is more representative of our cared for population, and launch a junior youth group to represent younger people's views.	Youth Support Manager	Oct 2023
3.15	Any risks associated with children in care offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited are understood and responded to.  Children receive help to reduce the risk of harm or actual harm.	Develop an integrated children services data set to ensure that children with multiple indicators are strategically understood, and practice is responding to their needs.	Supporting Families Manager  Business Intelligence Manager	Oct 2023
3.16	Cared for children and care leavers who live out of the borough have access to education and health services that meet their needs.	Ensure there is Director of Children's Services (DCS) approval of all out of borough placements.	Head of Service Cared for Children and Care Leavers	Quarterly review
3.17		Deliver twice yearly audits.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Quarterly review
3.18		Performance clinics will scrutinise holistic outcomes for children placed out of borough.	Head of Service Children's Safeguarding	Quarterly review
3.19	Children and young people make good educational progress at school or other provision since being in care.	Continue to provide support and interventions for schools and children to improve education outcomes and attendance.	Head of Service Inclusion	Termly and annual review
3.20		Continue to improve the completion rate and quality of personal education plans (PEPs).	Head of Service Inclusion	Termly review

3.21		Reduce fixed term exclusions within secondary, working with our partners to develop alternative strategies to inclusion.	Head of Service Inclusion	Monthly
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## 4. Children missing from education

### Overall Effectiveness

Children and young people who are missing from full-time school education (including those who are excluded from school) receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them. The local authority has arrangements in place to identify the number of children not in full-time school education and to respond if there are concerns about their welfare.

Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
4.1	Children and young people who are missing from full-time school education receive well-coordinated responses that reduce the harm or risk of harm to them.	Develop a three-year strategy to improve academic outcomes for disadvantaged learners.	Head of Service: Pupil Participation and Support	Dec 2023
4.2		Embed 'attendance is everyone's business' across the partnership through awareness raising sessions and training.	Head of Service: Pupil Participation and Support	Termly
4.3		Improve cross-service oversight of children missing out on education through a weekly head of service escalation meeting.	Director of Strong Start, Family Help and Integration	Sept 2023
4.4		Track and monitor that transition plans are being reviewed and increased and provide support and challenge to schools.	Team Manager: Attendance and Children Out Of School Team	Every 8 weeks
4.5		Provide support and challenge to schools for pupils that are persistently or severely absent or are at risk of becoming so through termly targeted support meetings	Team Manager: Attendance and Children Out Of School Team	Termly
4.6		Lead the development of the North West framework for alternative provision which will provide a set of approved providers, increase provision	Head of service: Pupil Participation and Support	Oct 2023

		available, reduce the time taken to arrange a place and allow more rigorous quality assurance systems.		
4.7		Develop our REACH programme – 3 day a week provision targeting young people who are risk of exploitation and have low attendance.	Youth Support Service Manager	Oct 2023

## 5. Care leavers

Overall Effectiveness		The experience and progress of care leavers. Professionals are committed to protecting them, promoting their emotional health and well-being, acting in their best interests and helping them to understand what is happening in their lives. They are ambitious for young people's futures and celebrate their achievements.		
Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
5.1	Care leavers have positive, trusting and stable relationships with their personal advisors, carers and other professionals.	Performance clinics consider workforce and longevity of relationship.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Quarterly review
5.2	We can evidence that we are in touch with young people and co-produce timely and qualitative assessments, including planning for leaving care starting early enough.	Proactive approach is taken to creating opportunities to engage with care leavers, including those not regularly in touch twice yearly.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Quarterly review
5.3	Assessment and planning considers specific circumstances including	Ensure quality assurance processes are in place, which are timely and focused on the individual circumstances of young people.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Quarterly review

	whether they are unaccompanied asylum-seeking children (UASC), a young parent or have had contact with the criminal justice system.			
5.4	The local authority works effectively with their partners in the health sector to ensure that care leavers can access good physical and mental health services	Health passports (which support care leavers to understand their health history) need to be visible in performance clinic information and evaluation of the impact of this is to be considered at pathway plan reviews.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC Independent Reviewing Officer	Quarterly review
5.5	The Local Offer for care leavers is ambitious, clear and accessible, and takes account of the corporate parenting principals and statutory and discretionary support.	Consultation with care leavers is regular and effective – using a ‘you said we did’ approach – and informs reviews of the Local Offer.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC Cared for Children and Care Leavers’ Committee	Quarterly review
5.6		Launch the app for the Local Offer	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Jan 2024
5.7	Any risks associated with children in care offending, misusing drugs or alcohol, going missing or being sexually exploited are understood and responded to.  Children receive help to reduce the risk of harm or actual harm.	Ensure quality assurance processes are in place and timely, to evaluate the impact of integration across the partnership and the impact of individual risk assessments for care leavers (increasing safety/reducing harm to self and others).	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC Independent Reviewing Officer	Quarterly



5.8	Care leavers develop skills and confidence to become independent and successful adults. They move from care towards independence at a time that is right for them	Increase the number of staying put arrangements.	Fostering Service Manager	Nov 2023
5.9	The local authority works closely with its partners, education providers, the virtual school and local businesses to secure a range of employment, education and training opportunities for care leavers, including work experience, apprenticeships and further and higher education.	Developing opportunities for apprenticeship within the council and local businesses. Developing a care leavers apprenticeship strategy based on an outstanding local authority's model.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Dec 2023
5.10	Care leavers make progress in employment, education or training that they enjoy, which meets their needs and interests and helps them achieve their potential.	Implementing a dedicated education worker within the Staying Close project to support care leavers to access education and employment.	Service Manager Care Leavers and UASC	Oct/Nov 2023

## 6. Fostering and adoption

### Overall Effectiveness

Adoption is considered carefully and promptly for all children who are unable to return home or to their birth families, and who need a permanent alternative home. Fostering and adoption panels, and the respective decision-makers, ensure that children are effectively matched with families.

Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
6.1	Service delivery to foster carers is understood specifically in relation to visiting frequency (including unannounced visits) and reviews.	Performance clinic reports to be accountable to the ILACS improvement and impact board.	Fostering Service Manager	Dec 2023
6.2		Develop a data set to outline statutory performance.	Fostering Service Manager	Dec 2023
6.3	Service response to early disruption is timely and resources accessed to prevent home and relationship breakdown for children and young people	Stability is prioritised and resources utilised through commissioning, @ct and @CE.	Head of Service Children's Provision	Oct 2023
6.4	Fostering and adoption panels and respective decision makers ensure that children are effectively matched with families.	Ensure there are arrangements in place to provide regular feedback on the effectiveness of the work of panels.	Head of Service Children's Provision Head of Service Cared For Children	Jan 2024

## 7. Quality of professional practice

### Overall Effectiveness

Cheshire East is a learning organisation with a social care workforce that is sufficient, suitably qualified and accredited to deliver high-quality service to children and their families.

Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
7.1	Leaders and managers have created an environment where good social work can flourish	Embed a restorative approach to support consistently good practice.	Principal Social Worker Workforce Development Advisor	March 24
7.2		Promote letter writing to the child/ young person within case recording.	All managers	Oct 2023
7.3		The training plan, masterclasses and bespoke lead practitioner support (targeted from performance clinics) support frontline practitioners to deliver good practice.	Principal Social Worker Workforce Development Advisor	Monthly
7.4	Management oversight of practice, including practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used clearly to improve the quality of decisions and support to children and families.	Continue to deliver the management and leadership training programme to embed outcome focused management oversight.	Principal Social Worker	Quarterly
7.5		Monitor compliance with supervision through performance clinics	Heads of service	Weekly
7.6	Decisions are made by suitably qualified and	Develop a workforce strategy.	Principal Social Worker HR Business Partner	Oct 2023

7.7	experienced social workers and managers.  Children, young people and families benefit from stable and meaningful relationships with social workers.	Collaborate with the North West to support the region to respond effectively to peaks in demand or workforce pressures through developing a non-profit bank of workers.	Principal Social Worker	August 2024
7.8	Careful monitoring of workloads and oversight of working conditions ensure that practitioners have the capacity to develop meaningful relationships with children and families.	Ensure systems are in place to monitor and report workforce data.	Director of Children's Social Care  Executive Director of Children's Services	Quarterly

## 8. Impact of leaders

### Overall Effectiveness

The impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.

Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
8.1	The leadership of the council recognise and prioritise the needs of children.	Ensure the key priorities for children's services are reflected in the council's new corporate plan and that these are based on what is most important to children and young people.	Executive Director of Children's Services	Feb 2024
8.2	The chief executive and lead member hold the	Continue to provide reports for scrutiny through the corporate safeguarding accountabilities meeting.	Director of Early Help and Children's Social Care	Quarterly

	DCS and the leadership to account			
8.3	Strategic leaders ensure that relationships with key partners provide an effective context for practitioners to work effectively with children and families.	Embed the new arrangements for the Safeguarding Children's Partnership, ensuring there is a clear focus on the impact on outcomes for children and young people.	CESCP Business Manager	Dec 2023

## 9. Quality Assurance

### Overall Effectiveness

The local authority responds appropriately, effectively and quickly to areas for development, service deficiencies or new demands, and shows resilience to new challenges. The local authority has detailed and relevant knowledge of its local communities and uses this knowledge effectively to meet their needs.

Ref	Intended impact	Action <i>What we will do</i>	Action Owner	Due by
9.1	Children and young people are listened to, practice focuses on their needs and experiences and is influenced by their wishes and feelings.  Accurate assessments of practice drive improvement.	Ensure that integrated quality assurance activity is focused on the lived experience of children and young people.	Audit Officer	Sept 2023
9.2		Develop an integrated quality assurance framework that aligns with QA arrangements for children with SEND.	Audit Officer	Oct 2023
9.3	Feedback from children and families informs	Triangulate the quarterly reports from the complaints and compliments service with other forms of intelligence to inform service development.	Complaints Support Officer	Quarterly

	practice and service delivery.		Head of Children's Safeguarding	
9.4	Practice scrutiny by senior managers, is established, systematic and used	Projected quality assurance activity to be tracked and scheduled and accountable to the ILACS improvement and impact board.	Head of Children's Safeguarding	Oct 2023
9.5	clearly to improve the quality of decisions and support to children and families.	Continue weekly performance clinics to focus on improving timeliness and compliance.	Heads of Service	Weekly